

FRANK R. ADAMS

40.
Aunt-"B!"
from Jennie



Five Fridays

by
Frank R. Adams

Illustrated by
Frank Godwin



When I had caught her and punished her as she deserved for
desertion I still held her tight in my arms for fear
she would escape me again. *See page 338*

FIVE FRIDAYS

BY
FRANK R. ADAMS

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FRANK GODWIN



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In Order
To Divide the Responsibility
For This
I Dedicate it to Her
Who is Responsible for Me

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“Fasti et nefasti dies.”

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When I had caught her and punished her as she deserved for desertion I still held her tight in my arms for fear she would escape me again. *See page 338* *Frontispiece*

“Oh, Frank,” she exclaimed, “would it make any difference if this wire were fastened to something?” 40

The old lady eyed me with evident suspicion. “Is he going to kiss me good-night?” she demanded 64

“I hope you are not angry with me,” Mrs. Green murmured, overawed by the disapproval of the men. “I can't see that I've done anything.”

“Madame,” the sheriff said, with gloomy politeness, “you have spoiled the only murder case we ever had in Maskaloon County, that's what you have done. Come on, boys.” 254

CHAPTER ONE
FAST ASHORE

FIVE FRIDAYS

CHAPTER ONE

"WE eat too much," stated Lucile definitely while we were having tea on the front porch.

"We certainly do," I assented idly, thinking how much clearer the air was over the lake than in the city I had just left.

"Why not give our digestive apparatus a rest?" she propounded.

"Why not?" I rushed to my doom. I was having my two weeks' vacation and was too happy at being able to spend it on the island to care anything about an argument.

"I suggest that we fast for a week."

A suggestion like that put me in a nice fix. I don't mind stating that at that time I was about two hundred and ten pounds of eligible bachelor, aged thirty-five, comfortably in love

with Lucile but too old and set in the complacent selfishness of single blessedness ever to pretend to be a Romeo. The idea of fasting gave me a sinking sensation right where there was the most room to sink.

"What?" I ejaculated, forgetting for the moment that I had a reputation for ready repartee.

"I said, 'Why not fast for a week?' I read an article by Lipton S. Clair about it just this morning. He claims that fasting thoroughly rebuilds the system, gets rid of all toxins and increases the mental efficiency fifty per cent."

She picked up a magazine which was propped open face downward on the lower shelf of the porch table.

"Listen to this," she continued. "'Eating three meals a day is simply a habit. We have made tyrants of our stomachs. They demand to be fed every few hours and if we answer that demand we are slaves.' There, that sounds like the reasoning of a thinker, doesn't it?"

"It sounds more like the reasoning of a thinker than of an eater."

Lucile reproved my flippancy with a glance. "I think it would do us all good."

"But I feel all right now." I called her attention to an obvious fact.

She dismissed my objection. "You can't be healthy unless you fast for a week at least once a year. Lipton S. Clair says so. Mother, you'll try it, won't you?"

"Try what?" Her mother at the other end of the porch laid down her book.

"Fasting for a week."

"Why, yes, if you want to." She picked up her book again as if she had decided nothing more momentous than a question as to whether she preferred cream or lemon in her tea. She had been used as an experiment station for so many years that nothing surprised her.

I got up casually and tried to slip indoors, but Lucile stopped me. "Don't you think it will be lovely, Montmorency?"

I collapsed into a chair which collapsed immediately after I did. She had called me by my first name! Yes, Montmorency is my first name. It sounds like several names but it is only my first. That first name thing made it

very hard to refuse. As I sat there on the porch surrounded by legs, rungs and other component parts of a chair, a terrific struggle went on in my being between my heart and my stomach and the weaker party won. Possibly my mind was stunned by my fall, although I have no recollection of hitting my head. I felt that Lucile was putting me to the test. From the look in her eye I knew that she was asking me to choose between love and beefsteak. So rising phoenixlike, and carefully concealing the place where I strongly suspected that the fabric of my trousers had been pierced by a splinter, I answered bravely, "Yes, I think fasting would be delightful."

So that was how we began.

As you can easily see, the cause of the trouble was that Lucile is one of those persons who take the magazine health and hygiene writers in good faith. It is impossible to convince her that those fellows have to make a living by their pens the same as other human authors and that every bizarre idea they can pounce on means just so much more copy at a regular rate per word. No, Lucile must needs try by experi-

ment every new theory, using herself or any convenient relative or friend as a laboratory.

The absurdity of Lucile's attempt to improve upon her health and looks is apparent to anyone who has ever been blessed with a sight of her. You can't make a slim young body like hers by simply rolling on the floor for an hour every day nor are soft brown eyes with long curly lashes the result of chewing any particular number of times upon a piece of steak. Nature must have been experimenting a good many centuries before she got just that particular texture for hair and that peculiar shade of cream velvet for complexions. To attain her sort of perfection it is necessary to have a set of perfectly good ancestors combined with a lucky star and the gifts of at least seven or eight gods and goddesses, but Lucile thinks that she has done it all herself and acts as if she expected to become a sort of crippled hippopotamus if she relaxed for a moment from the pursuit of health.

At this particular time, for nearly twenty-five years she and nature had been uninterrupted by matrimony in their job of decorating,

so that it is not to be wondered at that they had turned out a well nigh perfect product. There is nothing unfinished about her. She looks equally well in an evening gown or a bathing suit, a blessing denied to most women whose beauty goes either to one extreme or the other.

As you may have gathered, I thoroughly approve of Lucile as an exhibit in pulchritude. I cannot say that I so fully endorse her mental equipment. For some reason or other we almost never agree on any subject. In some respects this is an ideal state of affairs to keep alive interesting relations between a man and a girl. The man who finds himself liking the same things that his wife does is doomed. The fact that you almost always disagree with those nearest and dearest to you is nature's own device for preserving individuality.

Lucile thinks she is a Republican in politics, but likes Mr. Roosevelt because he plays tennis, while my family has always been Democratic since before the war. We never agreed on any play we ever saw. I suspect her opinion of being influenced almost entirely by the profile of the handsome hero, while I—I am

a dramatic critic and my opinion wouldn't be influenced by anything (so my enemies say) but dynamite or slow poison.

She sleeps out of doors on a porch even in the coldest weather. I prefer to woo Morpheus in a steam-heated interior. I, too, like air, and plenty of it, in some places, for instance in automobile tires. It makes traveling more comfortable. In my bedroom, however, when the thermometer is flirting with zero, I can get along all right if the window is open only just far enough to wedge in a dime.

The point where Lucile and I find the widest variant in our opinions and tastes is in the matter of food. I like mine the way you do yours, but she is a food faddist. She invites indigestion with all kinds of punk provender. Her stomach is resigned to its fate. It has suffered so much that it is grateful for any little thing that is dropped into it and is not surprised, no matter what it finds in its midst, so to speak, from horse feed to automobile sundries.

One of her early spasms was Fletcherism; then she struck the nuts-and-berries idea. I was a guest at her home the summer she tried

both of these things out. If you are going to Fletcherize, a piece of old boot tastes just as good as a steak and it is more economical. The adherents of the nuts-and-berries diet claim that it is a good food schedule because grizzly bears live on it. As far as I am concerned, being like a grizzly bear is a doubtful advantage, and besides, I don't believe it is possible for a bear to shell enough peanuts to live on.

You have to admit that the picture of a grizzly bear weighing about half a ton, sitting back on his haunches delicately nibbling at a gooseberry or a filbert is a foolish spectacle. It's like playing an exhibition game of chess in the Hippodrome. If I ever have any leisure time, I'm going to educate one grizzly bear to eat nourishing food. Can you imagine the gratitude of a beast that has been going through life on a diet of peanuts fed to him by small boys through the bars of his cage, when for the first time he gets his teeth into a roast turkey with cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie on the side. For the rest of his life that bear is going to be for me strong.

Lucile called a meeting to discuss ways and means.

"First of all," she said, "when the supply boat comes today we'll make them take back every edible thing they have brought, together with what we have on hand, so that we won't be tempted. Isn't it lucky our cottage is on an island all by itself so that it won't be possible for one of us to cheat by going to a hotel somewhere."

"Don't you think it would be a greater victory for us if we conquered the demon food with some supplies within easy reach?" I suggested, with a painful recollection of that supply boat which came only twice a week but carried delicacies of which Lucullus never dreamed.

"No, it's best to take no chances."

"There's the motor boat anyway. We could run over to the mainland."

"No, we couldn't." Lucile smiled. "Father is the only one who can run it and he won't be here until Sunday."

Thus another ray of sunlight flickered out. A man of my build does not crank up a marine

engine located near the floor of a boat. I might say he could not, but it is truer to say that he does not; if he is the least bit wise he does not even try it.

"I'll give the maid a week off," Lucile continued gaily. "As we're not going to eat anything we shall not really need her and she has been wanting to go home for some time. I'll let her go back with the supply boat. We'll begin our fasting tomorrow by going without breakfast."

She consulted the magazine again. "We have to drink plenty of good, pure water and think high thoughts all the time and we'll hardly notice the absence of food at all. Then next Monday we'll break our fast by drinking the juice of an orange and eating a handful of popcorn, just one handful so as not to shock our digestive apparatus by introducing anything solid into it."

But why harrow the reader with the rules and regulations which Lucile framed for us. Suffice it to say that they went into effect the next morning according to schedule.

We met at breakfast. I am never at my

best before I drink my first cup of coffee in the morning and the thought of the inhuman way I was about to treat my "tummie" depressed me more than usual. The table was ghastly white, unbroken by the usual cheerful array of steaming hot dishes. At each place was a large glass of water and a napkin. What the napkin was for I failed to discover. I imagine it was what the anthropologists would call "a survival of culture."

"We have fifty-eight five-gallon bottles of distilled water," Lucile informed us. "I wonder if that will be enough. It amounts to nearly one hundred gallons apiece."

I made a hasty mental calculation and decided that a hundred gallons of drinking water would last me the rest of my life.

Mrs. Green, Lucile's mother, was patiently cheerful and drank three glasses of water like a sponge. I didn't care much for mine. I had previously had no idea that water was so flat and tasteless. It is also an extraordinarily elusive and clammy thing to put into an empty stomach which is eagerly expecting bacon and eggs, muffins and coffee.

"I feel better already," Lucile said gaily, as we left the table. "My mind is clear—I have wasted none of my vital energy in merely digesting food."

I knew that she was quoting Lipton S. Clair, whom I was beginning to regard with disfavor, to say the least, but I refrained from voicing my opinion of a man who will help women to get even more fool ideas than they can think up by themselves.

I took a cigar from my pocket, cut the tip end off carefully with a silver cutter Lucile had given me the previous Christmas and was about to light it when she stopped me.

"No—no—no, you mustn't. Did I forget to tell you that while we are fasting we have to give up all stimulants and narcotics such as alcohol and tobacco?"

"What? Cut out smoking for a week?"

"Certainly," she replied firmly. "In the first place, if you don't you will be deathly ill. In the second place, the whole object of the fast is to rid the body of all toxic poisons, such as nicotine, alcohol and so forth. By the time you have done without tobacco for a week I

should not be surprised if you never smoked again."

"Nor me either," I reflected gloomily, out loud. "I'll be dead."

"Of course, if you don't care to make the experiment," Lucile said icily, "I'll put off the fasting for another week until Frank Bopp is here. I'm sure he will be willing to try it."

This was waving a red rag at me. Frank Bopp was my rival. After her reference to him I would have gone without breathing for a week if she had suggested it. Bopp is a thin, conversational insect who can perch on the arm of a girl's chair and chirp by the hour. Sometimes I regret that for architectural and educational reasons I can't do that, and then I remember what other men would think of me if I could and I am solaced. I refrain from saying what I think of the name "Bopp."

Thus through my love and jealousy I was led into deeper water, or shall I say more water, because somebody handed me a glass of the stuff every few minutes. I drank it in the vain hope that I could drown the inner man who seemed to be yelling for help all the time

and kicking me just below the belt buckle when he didn't get it.

That morning we went for a walk.

"Walking is the best exercise in the world," Lucile stated. "It is excellent for reducing surplus flesh around the abdominal region."

Invariably she had a little stinger for me concealed in any remark she might make. I have since learned that this is a sign that a woman takes a proprietary interest in a man.

Before we went she fed Tootles, her long-haired pup. Tootles is one of those dogs so constructed by nature that when you want to look her in the face you don't know where to look. I often wonder if Tootles herself isn't in doubt as to which end to wag.

"Isn't Tootles going to fast too?" I protested. "Can't she stand it as well as I can?"

"Possibly she could do it," Lucile said as she gave her a dog biscuit, "but she hasn't intelligence enough to understand why she should go without food."

"I'm not far above Tootles in intelligence then," I remarked, but under my breath this time, so she could not hear.

After watching Tootles eat we went walking. Whenever I go walking in the city I hire a taxicab. If I want to see nature in all her grandeur, do I go tramping through the woods? I do not. I buy a seat at a moving picture show where they are running a western outlaw film. "Nature for a nickel" is my motto. Fatigue is eliminated and the sum total of knowledge is advanced several thousand feet.

After we had covered several miles, as it seemed to me, I suggested that we had better not get much farther away from home.

"Why not?" Lucile queried.

"We might not get back in time for lunch."

"I brought our lunch," she said, and produced a flask of water.

I groaned. I had nearly forgotten that there was to be no lunch. It's curious how much you depend on meals to break up the day. All the morning long you keep thinking, "I must get so much done before lunch," and then in the afternoon you spur yourself on to an extra effort with the thought of a better dinner than usual when you get through. Take these meal landmarks out of your day and what is

left? Nothing but a dreary, dead level desert of time, a day whose limits seem interminable.

"How many days is it until we eat again?" I asked hopelessly.

"Six and a half," Lucile computed. "Then we get some orange juice and a few kernels of popcorn."

"Then what?"

"That's all for the first day."

A few kernels of popcorn! Can you imagine a kernel of popcorn floating hither and yon in all that sea of water and finally giving up with a despairing shriek when it finds there is no place to land?

"You mustn't think of things to eat; you're not really hungry—it is your imagination. Tighten your belt and you won't know that you haven't eaten."

I followed her advice. True enough, the belt was quite loose. A terrible thought struck me—a few days of fasting and I would have to wear suspenders! I had always prided myself on a self-supporting figure, as it were, and had jeered at the fence-rail build which is obliged to hang all its garments from its shoul-

ders. Already with one meal missing I was up to the last notch in my belt.

Along toward noon I noticed a distinct headache.

"That will pass away," Lucile assured me. "Lipton S. Clair says so, and he ought to know."

"Why ought he to know?" I snapped. "Did he invent headaches or is he just generalizing from reading about somebody else's headache? This pain I've got here has settled in my region of thought for a long run, and I defy any Lipton S. Clair to drive it out."

"Don't be cross," Lucile soothed. "Let me dip my handkerchief in this spring here and wet your forehead with it."

She did, and while it didn't do any good, I always like to have her fussing around me.

The spring is one that everyone visits who comes to the island, and there is a tin cup sitting on a rock nearby. I started to get a drink.

"You mustn't drink that water." Lucile stopped me. "You must not drink anything but distilled water while you are fasting."

"Why not?"

"Because when there is nothing else in it the stomach is particularly susceptible to disease."

That was more of L. S. Clair's magazine stuff. I knew it. Probably he got about five cents a word for it, too.

"That water, pure as it is, may have microbes in it," she continued.

"What chance would a microbe have against my stomach?" I returned bitterly, but I refrained from drinking the water. In those days that woman had me under her thumb.

At nightfall we sat around that white table once more. I think even Lucile's enthusiasm was wavering. It seemed distinctly more of an effort to be cheerful than it had at breakfast. Her mother was frankly miserable and eyed me with a glance which warned me that were we cannibals the laws of hospitality would hardly protect one of my build.

"Have some water, Mr. Blainey," Lucile said.

"I won't drink another drop tonight," I declared, "unless I can have some flavoring extract in it."

After that we sat around thinking about sweet potatoes and hash and steaks, but talking about the latest books and the moonlight through the trees. But what is moonlight on an empty stomach? Merely moonlight—nothing more. It is curious how fasting exaggerates the ego of the digestive apparatus. It becomes more important than any other part of the body. It demands attention and gets it. For instance, if Congress should start fasting the affairs of the nation would come to a standstill.

"What's that?" demanded Lucile, straining her ears to catch some sound out on the water.

We all listened. There was a faint "put—put" out there somewhere.

"It's Johnson's launch," said Mrs. Green. "I can tell because it misses every tenth explosion."

"Lipton S. Clair says that fasting makes all the senses extraordinarily acute," Lucile explained.

I know Mrs. Green said, "Damn Lipton S. Clair!" under her breath, but I did not hear it.

"I wonder what Johnson's boat can be doing

out here at this time of night," Lucile speculated.

"He must be bringing someone over here," said her mother. "Ours is the only island for miles which is inhabited as late as this in the season, and he certainly isn't out for a pleasure trip."

"It can't be father," Lucile mused. "He said he wouldn't be home until Sunday."

So we went down to the dock. It was moonlight and the old launch coming in looked some way romantic. What was she bringing us? Something within me suggested food, but the suggestion echoed hollowly through vast spaces otherwise unbroken by any sound save the lapping of water.

The launch came alongside, a man with a couple of grips jumped ashore, then the boat backed away and limped off again into the darkness.

"Why, Frank Bopp!" exclaimed Lucile, greeting the newcomer. "We weren't expecting you until next week."

"I know it," he said, "but I got two weeks' vacation instead of one, and I thought I'd be

welcome, so I grabbed the first train and here I am."

"Of course you are welcome." Lucile was wondering how she was going to break the news of the fasting to him.

"How are you, Monty?" He hailed me with the nickname I most detest and slapped me on the shoulder-blade where the sunburn was the worst.

I assured him politely, but untruthfully, that I had never felt better.

Then we went back to the house. All I had needed was the presence of this mosquito to be absolutely miserable. He knew more different ways of getting on my nerves, even when I was well fed, than any other individual in the world. I hated to think what the next few days would be like with Bopp and hunger for my companions.

Just at that time he was smoking a cigar. I'll bet it really was a poor one, but to me it possessed an aroma for which I would cheerfully have strangled him. I carefully stood to leeward of him so that the smoke would blow my way.

"Believe me," Bopp was saying, "I had some dinner on the dining car this evening. There was some fried chicken with biscuit and gravy, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob—"

"Isn't the moon beautiful?" interrupted Lucile. Even she could stand no more.

"Looks like a great big pumpkin, doesn't it?" Bopp blundered.

I am going to put a new verb in the dictionary, namely: "to Bopp," meaning to speak at length on any annoying subject.

Finally Lucile took him one side and explained about the fasting. The idea fascinated him, especially in its application to me. He offered to wager me huge sums of money which neither of us possessed, that I couldn't last for a week, and if I did he wanted to open a pool on my probable weight and waist measurement at the finish. You can imagine how much his talk amused me.

When we got back to the house Lucile passed everyone a glass of water. Bopp, with mock alarm, would not let me drink mine.

"Wait till I get a tire-gauge," he said, "and

see if Monty can stand another glass without bursting an inner tube."

"Don't be funny," interposed Lucile. "About tomorrow you'll feel the way Mr. Blainey does now."

"Why?"

"Anyone does after fasting the first day."

"Me? Fast?" Bopp laughed a clear ringing laugh. "No, thank you. I don't go in for those fads. I think I can have more fun watching Monty do a gradual disappearing act."

Lucile didn't tell him then that there was no food in the house, and I joyfully refrained, for fear of spoiling one little jot of the pleasure I would have in watching him when he discovered it for himself the next morning at breakfast.

"I'm going to bed," I announced stiffly.

"Are you sleepy so soon?" asked Lucile, kindly.

"Not sleepy, but very tired," said I, looking pointedly at Bopp. "I think I may read a while in bed."

I started to get a glass of water.

"Pass Monty the boiler compound," said Bopp. "He's getting full of lime."

"Good night, Mr. Blainey," said Lucile sweetly, to make up for the boor's rudeness.

I held her hand for an instant. "Good night, Miss Green." Then as I turned to go up the stairs I mumbled, "Good night, Bopp."

"Good night, Monty," he returned. "Gee, for your sake I hope we don't have a frost to-night or you are apt to burst."

I went upstairs and slammed my bedroom door. At last I could be alone with my misery. After I got into bed I tried lying on my back, on my side and on my stomach. It was no use: I could not sleep.

At last I heard the others coming upstairs to bed. I wondered if he had kissed her good night in the hall.

Someone knocked at my door.

I growled, "Come in."

Bopp stuck his head in at the door.

"Excuse me, Monty," he said, "I saw a light under your door and thinking you might be awake I brought you a book to read."

He tossed a volume on my bed.

"Thanks," I murmured.

He withdrew and shut the door.

I wondered if I had misjudged the man. It certainly was decent of him to bring me a book. I picked up the volume, read the title and threw it at the door he had just closed.

It was "The White House Cook Book"!

CHAPTER TWO
MAROONED

CHAPTER TWO

IN an æon or two it was daylight once more and I dressed my emaciated figure with care, inserting a precautionary safety pin hither and yon in the folds which were once the waist line of my garments. I took a melancholy pleasure in surveying the ravages which want and sleeplessness had wrought in my one time plenitude.

Early as I had risen, Lucile was downstairs almost as soon as I was. She wanted to get all the benefits of a glorious long day, she explained. Tacitly we avoided the subject of breakfast, and neither of us made any move to sit down at the dining-room table to fill up on water. We had our tipple standing and at separate times. When man feeds silently and alone he is approaching a state of savagery.

"Shall we waken Mr. Bopp?" I asked. "I should hate to have him miss any of this glorious day."

"No," vetoed Lucile, who suspected my mo-

tive. "The beauty of fasting is that it relieves one from all the restraint of convention. We are not tied down to meals, to regular rising and retiring. Everyone may consult his own convenience in the matter. You choose to arise and glory in nature, he prefers to dream."

I surmised that Lucile was guying me, but I let it go at that because I didn't want to quarrel with her. Not while Bopp was in the house. I wanted to save up all my fighting temper for him.

After I had revelled in the glories of nature for a while the entertainment palled on me and I picked up Sunday's newspaper. It's curious how much space is given in our press to the discussion of food. I opened the sheet to the market report and turned that page over in disgust only to run into an article labelled "Menus for the Week."

There were sounds of someone stirring upstairs.

"Frank is up," announced Lucile with relief. I think she knew there was a storm coming and was glad to get the suspense over with.

Bopp sang as he dressed. I never care for a

person who is cheerful before breakfast. It always seems to me as if they put it on to irritate others. The melody which Bopp dressed himself by was "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," and then as an encore he favored himself with "The Old Oaken Bucket," and "Suwanee River." After that he was entitled to all that was coming to him.

He came downstairs smiling and asked pleasantly, "Have you been out to pump your breakfast yet, Monty?"

When he noticed that Lucile was in the room he made no further allusions to eating or water. After a few moments of desultory conversation he went out into the kitchen. When he returned his face wore a puzzled expression.

"Do you know where the maid is?" he enquired. "I thought I'd ask her to make me a cup of coffee."

"The maid is taking a vacation," I answered hastily, for fear Lucile would rob me of the pleasure of telling him. "She won't be back for a week."

"Oh." He received the blow with open mouth. After a moment he recovered. "You

won't mind, will you, Lucile, if I get myself a bite?"

"I wouldn't mind in the least," she answered, "but there isn't a thing to eat in the house."

"Nothing to eat?"

"No. That's so we wouldn't be tempted to break our fast."

I sauntered casually over to the piano and with one finger picked out "I'm on the Water Wagon Now." Bopp was too stunned to notice it much.

"What shall I do?" he yelled, with all the rage of a regular man deprived of his breakfast.

"Why, you'll have to fast, too," said Lucile placidly. "It will make you feel better and will put flesh on your frame."

"But you said that it would make me thin," I interrupted.

"It works both ways," supplied Lucile.

"Me fast?" snorted Bopp. "I guess not. Not while I'm within two miles of the mainland. Is the motor boat in running order?"

"Why, yes, I guess it is," Lucile replied doubtfully. It is always well to be doubtful

about a motor boat. "But there is no one here who can run it."

"Huh," grunted Bopp unpleasantly, "I guess I can run it. I don't like to talk about myself but I have yet to meet the gasoline engine that does not cower at my approach. If there's a spark and if there's any juice in the gasoline tank, she's got to go."

Curiously enough I've heard that same statement made many times before by a person about to attack a gasoline engine. And fifty per cent. of those times the motor has not had to go. We all went down to see him off and sat on the dock until he got everything ready; all of us, that is, except Mrs. Green, who complained of a headache, poor old lady, and decided to stay in bed.

I did not help Bopp on his way much, as I should have liked to, because I know my limitations when it comes to motor boats. Now with an automobile I am right at home. When a car refuses to do what the advertisements claim for it all you need to do is to get out the tool kit, jack up one of the axles and telephone the nearest garage. Sometimes it isn't even

necessary to use the jack, but it looks more professional and impresses your passengers with your mechanical skill. With launches the personal equation enters more considerably, especially if the difficulty occurs in the middle of a large, restless lake. There is a peculiar wallowing motion about a motor boat which has ceased to move in among a lot of unsettled waves. This motion makes me unable to distinguish an S wrench from a bilge pump with any degree of certainty and also causes me to care very little about life and other trivial matters.

Bopp looked the engine over and sniffed. "Looks like it was built by a one-armed plumber's assistant with the St. Vitus' dance. However, it's very simple. A child could understand this."

He pulled a few levers, set the steering wheel just so, and started to get down to crank it. Then he straightened up again.

"Monty," he commanded, "loosen that line there, and when the engine starts, throw it aboard so I won't have to leave the steering wheel."

I did as he asked.

He turned the fly wheel over painfully. There was a sort of wheezing sound, but nothing resembling the regular explosion of a marine motor in the flush of perfect health, feeling its oats.

"The engine is cold," he announced briefly, and bent his back to greater efforts.

"The principle of the gasoline engine," I lectured glibly to Lucile, "is easily comprehensible to the intellect of a boy of ten. It consists simply of mixing gasoline in the thing-a-ma-jig which is drawn into a what-d'-you-call-it in the engine, and then when an electric spark is applied from the ding-bat there is an explosion. See—he turns the wheel over—this draws the charge of gas into the engine—now the eccentric trips the sparking device—now listen intently for the explosion. You can't hear it because there is a very good muffler on the boat."

Bopp expressed what he thought of me by hitting the engine a smart rap with the monkey wrench.

"What's the matter?" enquired Lucile

sweetly, wishing to smooth matters over. "Won't the engine run?"

That is always the prize question to ask the operator of a gasoline engine. Next time you see an auto stalled beside the road, with the driver dripping perspiration and tearing his heart out at the crank, ask him that, and you will hear him pour out his innermost soul in words of one syllable.

Bopp seemed disinclined to answer, so I did it for him. "You see, he could make the engine go, any child could, but he wants to get it all warmed up before he starts it. It is really kindness on his part. No humane man would want to make a poor, cold, gasoline engine run fast right at first. See! Mr. Bopp is going to hold it in his lap until it gets warm."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Bopp impolitely.

"That's impossible," I retorted. "The earth itself is over two-thirds water and I stack up considerably higher than that."

Bopp now had a smudge of dark grease on his light trousers, had worn a blister on the palm of his hand and had used up a collar completely. Manipulating a gasoline engine with-

out cuss words, scientifically speaking, generates poison in the inner being of man, a noxious distilled profanity, and Bopp had some fermenting inside of him that would have killed a rabbit instantly. He opened a valve on top of the engine, sniffed suspiciously, and looked wise.

"It's flooded," he remarked, with an air of finality.

"I can sympathize with it," I said, feelingly.

After rummaging around in the locker for a while he got out a collection of tools and began to remove a steel plate from the side of the engine.

"In order to make it easier to understand the inner workings of the engine," I explained to Lucile, "he is going to take it apart so that you may see each piece distinctly. I wonder if he knows that he spilled some cylinder oil in that place where he is now sitting. No matter. To resume our lecture, that thin piece of tubing covered with black grease is the crank-shaft. No—I am mistaken. That is the man's leg. The crank-shaft is that other thing not quite so thin and shapeless. Move your leg a little, will

you, Bopp, so that Lucile can tell which is the crank-shaft?"

There was no reply save a growl of rage from below, where the young man was standing on his head peering into the gizzard of the machine.

"Don't forget to tell me when to let go of the rope," I reminded him.

Lucile suddenly scrambled down into the launch.

"Oh, Frank," she exclaimed, "would it make any difference if this wire were fastened to something?"

He arose from his imitation of a kangaroo about to jump down a mine shaft, and took the wire from her fingers without comment. His feelings, whatever they were, he did not dare trust to speech. There was something majestic about the repression of the man that forbade comment. In palpitating silence he attached the wire to a place which seemed to be made for it, reassembled the engine, wiped off his hands and grasped the crank. He turned it once easily, and "zing"—the motor got down to business like a clock.



"Oh, Frank," she exclaimed, "would it make any difference if this wire were fastened to something?"

Lucile hastily scrambled out of the boat.

"Let her go," Bopp yelled, taking hold of the wheel in a pose a good deal like a Viking save for the grease on his trousers. (Did Vikings wear trousers? My memory is at fault.)

I threw the line on board with a feeling of envy for one who was speeding to a square meal.

"Keep to starboard!" Lucile yelled. "Keep to starboard! There's shallow water on the port side!"

Bopp spun the wheel and the launch turned abruptly to the left.

"The other way," screamed Lucile. "Starboard is on your right side!"

She was too late. The boat stopped suddenly. Bopp hastily took an impression of the steering wheel on the pit of his stomach, the engine threshed wildly for a few moments and finally expired with a snort.

I yelled to Bopp, "Do you want any help?"

"No," he replied, bowing to me unintentionally from pain, holding one hand on his belt line where the wheel had struck him. "I'll start the engine and pull her off in a jiffy."

To Lucile I explained in as loud a tone of voice as I could command, "It is a curious thing about many deep water sailors that they cannot tell their left and right hands apart. Say 'port' or 'starboard' to them and they get you at once."

Bopp managed to make the engine run again and started to back off from the bar when the propeller wheel struck something and proceedings ended then and there.

That was the absolute finish of the performance for that day. There was no encore. He couldn't turn the engine over again even by hand, and a little investigation disclosed the fact that the propeller shaft was hopelessly tangled in some heavy wire which the propeller had picked up out of the sand. Bopp discovered all this by sticking his head under water over the side of the boat.

"You might as well come ashore now," suggested Lucile. "We'll have to get a mechanic over from town next week to fix the boat."

So Bopp came ashore, by wading in rather chilly water up to his waist. Considerable of the bloom was rubbed from his usual natty ap-

pearance when he clambered on the dock, besmudged and dripping.

"Welcome to the Fasters' Club," I greeted him. "I would baptize thee as a brother in the Aqua Pura Fraternity, but I see there is no need. We'll go up to the house and give you a nice drink of water to warm you up after your chill."

"Where's the telephone?" demanded Bopp briefly, ignoring me.

"What's the matter?" asked Lucile.

He endeavored to be pleasant to Lucile. "I am going to telephone to town to have a boat come over to take me to breakfast."

"In the meantime," I requested, "would you mind moving over here a moment and dripping on these flowers which need water?"

Lucile took him to the telephone. I followed at a leisurely pace and by the time I got to the house I found Bopp whirling the lever of the telephone with exasperated energy. It was one of those country telephones where you have to grind a little business on the side of the box until Central happens to hear you swearing at the transmitter. The operator seemed more

oblivious than usual, and Bopp remarked "Hello" in every possible tone of voice from wheedling to a threat.

"I wonder," Lucile murmured vaguely, "if maybe it wasn't the telephone cable which you dug up with the propeller of the launch."

"What's that?" Bopp demanded.

"I said, 'It must have been the telephone cable you got mixed up in when you ran the launch aground.' That's why it won't work."

Bopp hurled the receiver into the hook which is designed to hold it.

"Don't be cross," she said soothingly. "Think pleasant things. You've got to stay. Make the best of it."

"Think pleasant things! I do! I think of ham and eggs. Can you suggest something pleasanter? How far is it to the mainland?"

"Two miles."

"And I can only swim a mile and a half."

"Why don't you start anyway?" I suggested helpfully.

"Hush," warned Lucile. Then turning to Bopp, who was headed for the door, "Where are you going?"

"Out in the woods to eat the leaves off the trees."

He slammed the door.

After he had gone a blessed calm reigned for a few minutes. All at once Lucile started.

"Suppose he should eat some poison ivy!" she exclaimed. "He's a city bred man and I don't suppose he knows what it looks like. Don't you think you had better go and show him where it is?"

"Sure, I'll be glad to go. I'll not only show him where it is—I'll feed it to him."

"No—I'll go," she said; "you two might quarrel."

Right there I made my mistake. I let her go after him. So she spent the day with him instead of with me. Watching Bopp's discomfort had made me forget my own, but now that I was alone I became more oppressed than ever. I got up and sat down again. I couldn't get comfortable. There was nothing to do. My head did not feel in a condition to allow me to read and there was no work to occupy me as there would have been at home.

While roaming about the empty rooms I

heard a whine and looking for its source found Tootles in the kitchen trying to reach the shelf where the dog biscuit were kept. In the excitement Lucile had forgotten to feed her. With melancholy pleasure in sparing some living creature the pangs I felt myself I got down the box of biscuit and gave the dog one.

There were twelve of the little cakes left in the box. The dog seemed very fond of them. One would not be missed. I hope I never have to go through such temptation again. I weighed a biscuit in my hand, I sniffed its fragrance and then—I put it aside. I would stick to my promise. But the memory of that biscuit haunted me the rest of the morning. Every time I thought of it I had to cut a new hole in my belt. I went back to the shelf a hundred times and looked longingly at the box, but always tore myself away with a sigh.

Some time during the late afternoon Mrs. Green dressed and came downstairs. She said she was feeling better, but she was pale and seemed a trifle unsteady on her pins.

Clouds began to obscure the sky about sundown and Mrs. Green fretted a good deal be-

cause Lucile was away from home. In order to ease her mind I volunteered to find the couple and take them raincoats and umbrellas. Just as I opened the door to saunter forth the storm burst.

There was a deafening roar of wind which whipped the branches of the trees in sudden fury, then a quick rattle of hail driven like bullets against the eaves-troughs. Just as I turned back to avoid the stinging fusillade of hail, the sky appeared to split in the middle with a blinding light and a ripping crash of thunder which fairly made my heart stop beating. The lightning had obviously struck somewhere in the vicinity.

The crash of thunder outside was echoed by a thud inside. I looked around. Mrs. Green was lying at full length on the floor. From having seen it done on the stage I knew that she had fainted.

I dropped the bundle of raincoats and ran to her assistance. First I held her head on my lap but couldn't seem to get any further toward reviving her. Somewhere I had read directions for reviving fainting ladies. One of the

first things recommended was to loosen the corset, but this seemed to be an unpardonable liberty to take with a lady I had only met a few times. Besides I didn't know how to locate a corset and wouldn't have been able to loosen it if I had found it. It would be a godsend if someone would get out a book on "How to Revive Fainting Ladies Although a Bachelor."

I looked up to find a strange man in the room. He was clad in overalls and carried a satchel.

"Are you married?" I demanded.

"I don't know why it's any of your business," he responded, "but I am. Further than that I'm an Elk and belong to the union."

"If you're married, tell me what to do with a lady who has fainted."

"Give her some of this."

He produced a flask from his pocket and poured a large portion of its contents down Mrs. Green's throat.

"The dame will be all right in a minute. I always carry this just on purpose for ladies when they pull a fadeaway." He sampled the Lady Reviver himself reflectively and returned

the flask to his pocket. "I'm the telephone repair man. What ye been doing to the wires over here? They been trying to get you from the main office all day."

I told him where the trouble lay and he departed in the rain to patch it up.

Shortly afterward Mrs. Green opened one eye. She looked at me for a moment and then smiled.

"Hol' your head steady a minute," she requested gravely. "Wanna see who y'are."

"I'm Mr. Blainey," I explained. "Everything is all right."

"Course it's a' right. But I don't think I'll get up till the boat stops rockin'."

"You're not in a boat, Mrs. Green. This is your own home."

"It's a boat, I tell you. I guess I know when I'm seasick. Besides, at home, ain't got so many pictures of purple sunsets."

"But there aren't any pictures of purple sunsets, here," I protested.

"You're mistaken, my fren', there's two of 'em over there." She pointed limply in the arc

of a circle which took in the entire opposite side of the room. "I'll show you. Hol' this board steady while I step on it."

She gravely made an effort to rise, but failing in that fell back limply into my arms.

"It's no use. Ship rocks so I can't stan' up. Have to roll over there."

I tried to prevent her but it was useless. She insisted on rolling on the floor. She was engaged in that pleasant pastime when her daughter and Mr. Bopp entered, dripping from the rain storm.

I tried to pick Mrs. Green up.

With a cry of alarm Lucile rushed to her mother's side, then started back, sniffing the air.

"Mr. Blainey," she cried in horror stricken tones, "you've been drinking!"

I shook my head.

"Don' scol' my lil' fr'en'," Mrs. Green protested, patting my arm. "He's mos' beautiful fr'en' I got."

A light of understanding began to dawn in Lucile's eye.

"She fainted," I explained, "and a man who

was here to repair the telephone gave it to her to revive her. It was too much on an empty stomach."

"Is the telephone fixed?" demanded Bopp, springing up. "Maybe I can get a launch to come for me yet."

The look which Lucile gave him warmed my heart and made up to me for the hours I had spent alone that day. He sank back into his chair.

"Will you call up Dr. Stone, Montmorency," she requested sweetly, "and ask him to come over to see mother."

"Surely," I replied.

"You won't need any number. Just tell the girl to ring Dr. Stone's residence."

I did and soon had the doctor on the wire. I told him that we wanted him to come over.

"I don't believe that it is possible," came the answer over the wire.

"Not possible?" I echoed. "Why not?"

"Haven't you seen the sea that is running? It wouldn't be safe for any kind of a boat to land at Green's Island the way it is blowing now. You know the shore is very rocky there

and if you miss the entrance to the cove, you'd be dashed to pieces sure."

I told that to Lucile.

"Ask him what we should do for mother ourselves," she instructed. "Tell him she has some fever and seems very weak."

I told the doctor what she had said and asked what we could do for the old lady until the sea quieted down enough so that he could come over. He told me and I hung up the receiver.

"Well," Lucile interrogated, "what did he say?"

"He said," I repeated carefully, "he said, 'tell her to give her digestive apparatus a rest. Don't eat anything for twenty-four hours and drink plenty of water.'"

Bopp laughed derisively.

The elder lady showed signs of interest. "Thass what I want—water," she declared, "plenty o' water. Blainey, beautiful fr'en', gimme some water. Have some yourself."

I gave her a glass of water which she drank with enviable relish. I poured her a second glass.

"Bes' water I ever tasted," said Mrs. Green,

attempting to put some in her eye under the mistaken impression that it was her mouth. "Blainey, be like me. Never drink anything stronger than this water an' you'll always be blithe an' gay, jus' like me. There's on'y one thing bothers me. It's whether those stairs are goin' up or comin' down. I wanna go up but I'm 'fraid th' stairs are comin' down."

"The stairs are just the way they always are, mother," Lucile said reprovingly, "and you are going up to bed."

"Go to bed?" echoed her mother. "I don' wanna go to bed. I wanna change my clothes. I'm gonna put on my red dress."

Mother and daughter started up the stairs. On the landing Mrs. Green halted, turned and waved her hand limply at me.

"Goo' bye, beaut'ful Blainey. Most beaut'ful man I ever met. Goo' bye."

After she had been dragged around a bend of the stairway by her scandalized daughter, there drifted down to the living room a grumbled fragment of indignant protest: "Well, he is beaut'ful. He's more beaut'ful than th' Methodis' minister an' you know it."

CHAPTER THREE
THE RAID ON THE KITCHEN

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN we were left alone together I could tell by the scowl on Bopp's face that he had fallen heir to the headache I had possessed the day before. Only I think his may have been worse because he had been smoking all day long.

"Cheer up, Bopp," I admonished, more to make conversation than anything else. "I am just as hungry as you are."

"That isn't possible," he declared. "No one has ever been as hungry as I am."

"Probably I am more hungry than you are," I insisted. "I have more room to be hungry in."

Tootles came romping in, barking vociferously.

"Poor pup," commiserated Bopp. "I suppose she is starved, too."

"No, that isn't the reason she's barking. She has been fed."

"Fed? What?"

"Dog biscuit."

"Where are they?"

"In the kitchen," I replied, unthinkingly. "From the way she is behaving there must be someone outside."

It was almost dark. I went to the door and peered out. There was a man coming up the path.

"Who is it?" Bopp demanded.

"I can't make out."

"Maybe it's a man off the supply boat."

"Impossible," I explained. "The supply boat isn't due until tomorrow, and even if she were here they couldn't land from her in this storm."

By this time the man had reached the porch. The wind blew his wet garments around his lean figure and the water was dripping disconsolately from the peak of his cap.

It was the telephone repair man.

I opened the door and admitted him.

"I guess I got to stay here all night," he announced. "The storm is getting so bad I don't dare try to row back to town. I don't care

much for water unless it's mixed with something else."

Lucile came downstairs. I explained the situation to her.

"Of course you can stay all night, but it will be impossible to give you anything to eat," she said.

"Why not?" he asked. "I don't expect to go to the trough with the family. I'll feed with the help in the kitchen without a murmur. As far as that goes, though, I'm a union man and as good as anybody."

"Certainly," agreed Lucile. "You are welcome to anything we have, but we have nothing."

"No grub?" he queried incredulously.

"None whatever," she explained. "We are all fasting. We decided not to eat anything for a week."

"Bugs," he decided briefly. Then turning to Bopp and myself, "Gents, put me right. Do I or do I not coal at this station?"

"The lady has told you correctly," I assured him. "There is no food in the house."

"And you're doing it, too?" He laughed

sarcastically. "When I come here the old lady was pulling a Brodie on the floor and now the fat guy ain't eating anything. A bunch of dips all right."

"You had better go upstairs and change your clothes," said Lucile.

"What will I change 'em into? A nickel-plated wash-boiler or a pair of diamond earrings?"

"I mean, put on some dry things. Frank, you and he are about the same size. You'll lend him a suit of yours, won't you?"

Sure he would. He had to. Lucile has a way of making a request that leaves you with no other course open.

When they were at the top of the stairs Bopp yelled down, "Monty, Mrs. Green wants you to come up."

I started to go but Lucile stopped me.

"Ask her what she wants," she instructed Bopp.

In a minute he returned with the answer.

"She says she isn't going to sleep until she sees her beautiful friend Monty. If he doesn't come up she'll come down."

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Lucile, blushing, went up to explain to her mother that her request was impossible. From behind the closed door of Mrs. Green's room there issued sounds of an argument, supplemented by weeping.

Eventually Lucile came to the top of the stairs and called, "Monty."

How different that name sounded when she used it. I bounded up the stairs. When I say "bounded," I mean it. It was the first time that I had done anything like that in years. I don't know whether to give the credit to fasting or to Lucile. I'd prefer to blame her for it.

She stood leaning over the bannister, perplexed and troubled, her face flushed and her hair becomingly disarranged as if she had been engaged in a physical contest of some sort. I stopped on the stairs below her.

" 'The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven; ' "

I quoted.

"Don't be silly," she said in a tone of voice that told me she liked it. "I have to ask you a dreadfully embarrassing question."

"All right," I commanded. "Shoot."

"Would you mind very much kissing a lady who is not as young as she was once?"

"Would I mind?" I said, taking her hands. "I've been thinking of nothing else for two years."

"I meant,"—disengaging her hands gently, "would you mind kissing mother good night. She is acting very peculiarly this evening, as you know, and she says she won't go to sleep until you kiss her. I had no idea that she could be so stubborn."

I was touched at the old lady's fondness for me. We went in. She was lying tucked up in bed, with a night-cap tied firmly under her chin.

"Lucile made me come to bed," Mrs. Green volunteered, her bright eyes snapping with wakefulness. "It's all nonsense. Don' wanna be in bed. I wanna get up and go somewhere with you and eat."

"There, there," said Lucile, "the doctor says not to eat anything."

"Yes," snapped her mother, "and I'll bet he had just had his dinner when he said it."

I know a place to eat over in town, Beautiful Blainey—lots of fine steaks, chops and roas' beef. Guess I'll get up."

She started to throw back the covers, but Lucile forcibly restrained her.

"You said you would go to sleep if I brought Mr. Blainey in to see you," she said.

The old lady eyed me with evident suspicion. "Is he going to kiss me good night?" she demanded.

I assured her that I was there for no other purpose.

"A' right," she sighed, "then I'll go to sleep."

And she did. Or at least we didn't hear another sound from her that evening.

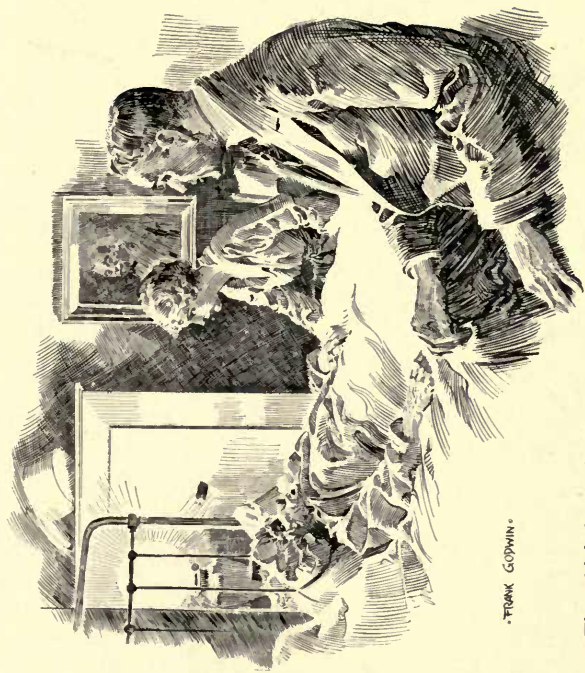
When we left the room and closed the door softly, Lucile put her hand on my arm and said, "Thanks, Monty. It was awfully silly, but I didn't know how else to quiet her. You won't think anything of it, will you?"

"Of course not. It's all in the family anyhow, or if it isn't I wish it were," I hazarded, emboldened by the pressure on my arm. For the moment I could not have been any happier if I had been fed.

After a while the telephone man came downstairs in a suit of Bopp's clothes; light flannel trousers, outing shoes, fancy shirt, soft collar, tie, and blue serge coat. The togs fitted him remarkably well and except for a vernacular line of conversation the man did not seem ill-suited to the clothes. At any rate I liked him better than I did Bopp. What to do with him seemed to be puzzling Lucile. It didn't seem right to ask him to go out in the kitchen and drink water all by himself, and there was no other place to put him unless he stayed in the living-room with us. Before she could decide one way or the other he seated himself comfortably and proceeded to entertain us with considerable conversation about himself.

"I ain't a rube," he volunteered. "I've been near enough Fifth Avenue to know good clothes when I see 'em, and I have to admit that Mr. Bopp is a swell dresser. I only work here in the summer time. In the winter I stick around within sight of the Statue of Liberty. I'm a wire-tapper."

"A wire-tapper?" repeated Bopp. "Isn't a wire-tapper a sort of a crook?"



FRANK GODWIN.

The old lady eyed me with evident suspicion. "Is he going to kiss me good-night?" she demanded. *See page 63*

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"Not compared to a burglar. Wire tapping is just high finance."

While the storm yelped and howled without he rattled on. Having missed only one meal as yet, his mind was less occupied with food than ours, and he was able to speak of other things. His name, it appeared, was Harold Kent, he was married, was a Socialist in feeling if not in theory, had been a jockey, a tout, a telegraph operator, and hoped to learn to fly an aeroplane. Otherwise, his was an uneventful history.

All the time I was listening my mind was occupied with trying to account for the thrill which had jolted me when I had taken Lucile's hands in mine at the top of the staircase. Being a dramatic critic by profession I had seen so much love from an aisle seat about six rows back, that I had outgrown my childish belief that there was "any sich a animile." Maybe my sensation came simply from lack of food. If it did it was almost worth while to go on fasting for the rest of my life to see if it would not happen again.

I decided to put my fortunes to the test. I

would sit up until Bopp went to bed and then ask her to marry me.

Kent, the telephone man, retired first, promising himself out loud to be up and off breakfastward at daybreak.

"I think I'll sit up a while," I said, stealing a look at Lucile and hoping that she would comprehend my intention.

"If you're going to sit up, I'll stick," said Bopp, with Machiavellian cordiality. "I'll split a gallon of water with you."

There we sat, and we drank glass after glass of water until eleven o'clock. Then Lucile decided to retire and spoiled the whole game.

"I guess I'll turn in now, too," I suggested tentatively, hoping at least that I would get a chance to speak to her on the stairs.

But no, Bopp developed a sudden fondness for my society and accompanied me to my room and sat on my bed for a while, talking about affairs theatrical, assuming that I was interested in them, which I was not.

When he finally departed the house was dark and the wind of the storm made unearthly noises around the eaves. I was more tired than

I remembered to have been for years, but not sleepy. I don't know whether it was actual hunger or merely the idea that I had not eaten anything for forty-eight hours which haunted me. At any rate, every time that I closed my eyes I'd have a vision of those dog biscuit. I might just as well have pictured a chocolate cake or a doughnut to myself, but no, it was a dog biscuit. It was their nearness that lent enchantment to their quality.

After an hour or so of that kind of torture I at last decided to satisfy my fool imagination by showing it a dog biscuit in the life and proving that it was not desirable at all. That was the only reason that I went downstairs.

It is rather ticklish business roaming around a strange house wearing no other padding than a suit of pajamas. I banged my shins unmercifully against several hundred pieces of furniture, but I toned my remarks thereat to a pitch below the howling of the storm. An occasional flash of lightning helped me momentarily from time to time, but left me floundering in the intervals.

Finally, in the kitchen, I groped my way to

the shelf and the box of dog biscuit was in my hands. Furtively I took one out, fondled it and sniffed it. Being alone there with that unprotected dog biscuit was too much for my moral courage. I decided to throw honor to the winds. There was so much wind and so little honor that no one would notice it.

I set my teeth in the dog biscuit!

Suddenly there was a sound on the stairway, a noise apart from that made by the storm. I listened intently. It came again—the creaking of a stair.

Who could it be?

Possibly it was Kent, the ex-wire tapper. His early training might have proved too much for him and he had decided to loot the place and make his escape. Maybe he would not stop at murder if balked of his design. I made up my mind to behave valiantly, and grasped a dog biscuit firmly in one hand, determined to sell my life as dearly as was consistent with the high cost of living. The box containing the rest of the biscuit I put back on the shelf and crouched behind the stove ready to spring at the intruder unawares as soon as he entered.

There is an awful moment in the life of the average man when he hears burglars in his house and decides to put them to flight single handed. He, the householder, knows that burglars are armed and expecting trouble, and that in a fight the wide-awake thief has the advantage over the suddenly aroused inmates. Knowing that it is foolhardy he goes on just the same. Why? Brave? Maybe, but usually because of Public Opinion. It is the correct thing to defend your house against thieves. It has been so ever since Magna Charta and before that, when burglar insurance and automatic revolvers were not invented. A man who does not defend his own property even when it is fully insured is regarded as a poltroon. There isn't any sense to it, but it is so. Haven't you done it yourself?

At any rate I had one of those flashes of insane bravery which is nine-tenths fear when I saw the light of a pocket lantern straggling along the wall at the foot of the stairs.

I jumped four feet straight up in the air when something wet touched the sole of my bare foot which was extended behind me as I

knelt behind the stove. My exclamation was drowned in a crash of thunder. Burglar or no burglar, I was about to run to him for protection from that clammy thing which had touched me when a second flash of lightning showed Tootles frisking around my feet. She was frightened by the storm and had touched my foot for companionship.

Somewhat shaken I crouched behind the stove again in time to see a dim figure enter the kitchen. Before it came near enough for me to spring the lightning revealed Lucile in a dressing-gown with her hair over her shoulders. I can't remember details, but I do know that in the single flash of light she appeared to be the most beautiful thing that I had ever seen.

She turned the flashlight on the wall and finally rested its ray on the box of dog biscuit! She went over to it, picked up one of the biscuit, pressed it to her cheek and was about to bite it, when she hastily dropped it back into the box, put out the light and stood perfectly still, listening.

There was another sound on the stairs!

When I looked to see what Lucile was doing she had disappeared. Probably she, too, was hiding somewhere near, I reasoned.

This time there was less delay. Whoever was coming downstairs was carelessly assured and was scratching matches on the wall as he went along to guide his progress.

He entered the kitchen.

It was Bopp, clad in the sort of pajamas I thought he wore.

He was laughing to himself as he came in and went straight to the box of biscuit. He took one out of the box.

And he ate it!

Before that I may have disliked the man, but now—

A smile of enjoyment spread over his features plainly discernible when the lightning flashed. Evidently the dog biscuit were delicious.

At last he finished and started to leave. I was about to breathe a sigh of relief when I happened to glance toward the shelf where the biscuit were kept.

The box was gone. The fiend was taking

them with him. Without a thought for poor Tootles, who would doubtless starve to death, he was going to eat all her food.

With one bound I was upon him. The thought of that poor dog steeled my heart. I grabbed him by the throat and we swayed back and forth in a rough and tumble fox-trot movement to the tune of the rolling thunder. Bopp did not know as I did that Lucile was watching somewhere there in the darkness, and on that account he was able to use more forcible language than I, but I had superior weight and I was slowly bearing him back when all at once he dropped the box of dog biscuit and with his free hand landed a wallop in my stomach! It would have been a foul under any circumstances, but with my inner workings resembling those of a vacuum cleaner it was positively inhuman.

Maddened by that blow, I growled between my clenched teeth, "If you hit me below the belt again I'll tear your pajamas!"

He growled back, "Let 'er rip," and swung on me twice more in the same place.

With mad fury I picked him up and hurled

him from me. There was a terrific crash of glass and then, save for the disturbance outside, all was still.

I lit the light—acetylene gas.

The wreckage of that kitchen was beyond the descriptive powers of a mere dramatic critic. Bopp lay sprawled on the kitchen floor near the table where he had struck when I threw him. The table itself had overturned on to the week's supply of water in glass bottles, and had apparently broken most of them. Lucile was standing, pale and dishevelled, but still beautiful, in the doorway of the pantry where she had been hiding.

After an interval Bopp laboriously picked himself up and waded toward the stairway through the torrent of distilled water which was streaming across the floor.

"There's your dog biscuit," he sneered, pointing to Tootles, who had discovered the box and was gulping down the contents as fast as she could. "Fasting for a week! Ha! Ha!"

Then he disappeared upstairs.

I turned to Lucile. She had dropped into a

chair and had buried her face in her hands. She was crying.

"What's the matter, Lucile?" I asked tenderly.

"I don't know," she sobbed; "just nerves, I guess."

"You ought not to be about at this time of night," I said sternly.

"I know," she replied. "I just came down to—to feed Tootles."

I would have believed her if I had not seen the biscuit in her mouth. But what man would not forgive a small fib on the part of the woman he loves?

"Listen to me, Lucile dear," I said authoritatively, taking her hand, "we are not going to fast any more. If your father were here he would call a halt. Here your mother is sick, you are hysterical, and hardly any one of us is on speaking terms with the others. Besides, we have got to stop. Our water supply is gone."

Lucile looked up. "Then it won't really be our fault, will it?" she asked hopefully. "If

we haven't pure water we can't go on fasting. Lipton S. Clair says so."

"And that's the best thing he ever said, too," I agreed heartily.

So it was decided that the next day we'd have a new stock of groceries come on the supply boat and telephone the cook to come back. I think the prospect cheered us wonderfully. I know I felt better immediately and I persuaded Lucile to go back to bed and get some rest before daylight.

She went in to see how her mother was before retiring.

There was a cry from Mrs. Green's room and I rushed in.

Mrs. Green had disappeared!

THE RAID ON THE KITCHEN

we have a party with us and a good dinner

is given to the party.

"And this is the first thing in the kitchen."

I started to run.

So it was not just that the party was

and a new kind of excitement came to the

my heart and a light in my eyes.

I think the respect that I had for

I know I feel better than ever.

needed to be in the kitchen and to

that I felt better.

The first thing in the kitchen was

the kitchen.

There was a new kind of excitement

I started to run.

So it was not just that the party was

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CHAPTER FOUR

MYSTERY.

CHAPTER FOUR

You have guessed correctly that this is where the element of mystery enters the story. You doubtless wonder, as we did, if Kent, the wire tapper, had made away with Mrs. Green, or if Bopp, balked of his dog biscuit, had become a villain of the deepest dye.

We did not come to any such conclusions at first, of course. That was after we had looked all over the house, up in the attic and down in the cellar. Then I went to Kent's room. He was snoring peacefully. I mistrusted that he might be shamming and poured a pitcher of water on him to see how he would react to the shock. Judging as well as I could without scientific instruments I should say that his reactions were perfectly normal—albeit somewhat picturesquely abusive.

Next, we haled Bopp from his room. He was inclined to be suspicious at first until we told him about Mrs. Green's disappearance.

Then he was all sympathy and joined our lightly clad searching party in the hallway.

Naturally, Lucile feared the worst, while the rest of us with masculine optimism discounted any danger which might befall the old lady.

"But she wasn't herself," wailed Lucile. "She's been acting funny all the evening."

"Never mind about her," comforted Kent. "A man with a jag can fall off the roof and never hurt himself a bit. A bit of a bun makes anybody lucky."

"Suppose she is out in all this rain?"

"A little water, more or less, won't make any difference to her after the last two days," I observed gloomily.

"Let's not stand here any longer," said Bopp, in businesslike fashion. "It won't do much good to try to guess where she is. Let's begin a systematic hunt."

"Let's get on some regular clothes first," I suggested.

"All right," in chorus.

Lucile dressed faster than she ever had before or has since, and we men with the usual

celerity of the bifurcated sex, were ready as soon as she was.

As soon as we had assembled in the living-room once more, Bopp, by reason of his superior nerve, elected himself commander of the expedition.

"Monty," he directed, "you take Jesse James with you and explore the north half of the island. Lucile and I will search the southern portion. As soon as either party discovers Mrs. Green, come back to the house and fire off this revolver." He laid a large caliber six-shooter on the table.

I might have disputed his arrangement and calm appropriation of Lucile's society, but I judged that it would be a poor time to argue about anything so purely social. Besides, I figured out that the man who was with Lucile was going to have no cinch reassuring her that her mother had not met with some terrible taking-off. So they went one way, and we departed the other, everybody sloshing internally and externally on account of the large amount of distilled water and rain.

The actual downpour had settled into a

steady drizzle which the wind hurled into our faces stingingly.

"How are we going to hunt this skirt, anyway?" demanded Kent, after we had trudged northward for a few moments.

"Just hunt," I replied vaguely, too busy with my thoughts to consider the question seriously.

"This ain't regular," objected Kent, slacking up his pace. "We ought to trail the old dame by her footprints. Did you notice any footprints around the house?"

"No. I didn't think to look."

"Well, let's go back and have a peek."

As that coincided with the methods of reasoning adopted by the detectives in the best sellers, I agreed and we retraced our footsteps to the house.

"You seem to know a good deal about detective methods," I said, with mock admiration.

"Yeh," he responded seriously, "I ought to. I've been chased by some of the best detectives in New York." Then he added proudly, "I had Burns after me once."

We found ourselves at the house once more.

"Under her window is the first place to look,"

said Kent, alive with interest now in the scheme. "Where did she sleep?"

I picked out the window of Mrs. Green's room and we carefully searched the wet ground underneath by lighting matches and kneeling in the mud.

"Isn't it more probable that she would come out by the door?" I suggested. "She could never climb from that second story window."

"Sure she could," he asserted. "See that rain pipe here? It goes alongside her window. A lady like her could shin up and down that like a mice."

Someway the picture of my future mother-in-law (I hoped) frisking up and down a narrow water pipe was beyond my imagination.

"Look here," exclaimed my companion, pointing to the ground in front of him. "Is that, or is it not, the print of a lady's shoe?"

I looked. There was certainly a footprint there and it was small and narrow.

"It's fresh, too. You can tell by the mud that it's been made since the heavy rain. Old footprints would have been washed out anyhow."

This was sure enough reasoning so I did not dispute it.

Kent started to walk in the direction that the footprints led and I followed, being careful not to step on the marks in the soft mud. All at once Kent stopped and lit several matches all in one place.

"What's the matter?" I enquired.

"I think I've solved the mystery," he said, bending over the mud. "But it looks bad for the doll."

"Why?"

"There's a guy following her. Look at these marks."

With a shudder I verified his statement. Larger footprints were in the mud with the small ones. The owner of the large shoes had evidently followed the lady, because in many cases the small footprints were partially obliterated by the larger ones.

Kent echoed my own thought. "Gee, I wish we had brought the 'gat' with us."

"Let's hurry on before it's too late," I urged.

So we pressed forward at a killing pace, only stopping once in a while to assure ourselves

that we were on the right track. At one place the ground was trampled over a considerable area.

"He caught up with her here," Kent interpreted. "They struggled. Look, she dropped this."

He picked up a handkerchief. By the light of a match I discovered that it was marked "G." There could be no doubt; we were on the right track.

"She got away from him, though," exulted Kent. "See here, just beyond her footsteps are ahead again."

We hurried on. I had left my breath miles behind and made no attempt at speech. I was terribly tired, but the thought of what Lucile would think of me if I did not strain every nerve to save her mother urged me on.

A quick spurt of flame ahead halted us. We heard an indistinct murmur of voices, the sound of twigs being broken, then absolute silence.

"Sh!" Kent whispered. "As we are not armed, we must creep up as close as we can, then when the son-of-a-gun pipes us off we can

spring on him before he can wing us. Do you get me?"

I admitted that his plan was good.

"Then on your knees and be careful," he commanded.

I dropped to my knees with a feeling of fatigue which warned me what an effort I should have to make when it came to rising to a standing posture again. We crept through mud puddles without noticing them.

There was no sound, but all at once I felt someone to be near. I held my breath and crouched ready to hurl myself at whatever man or thing stood before me. I heard the sound of a safety match being scratched unsuccessfully against a box. When it finally lighted what would be revealed? I hated to look, yet dreaded more the intolerable suspense.

At last the match sputtered and flared. A jagged circle of yellow light flickered a moment while I crouched ready to spring, then burned dimmer and went out. Still I remained unsprung.

The silence was unbroken until the light disappeared, then Bopp's laugh rang out loud and

clear, followed a moment later by a hysterical giggle which I recognized as Lucile's.

While I scuttled away as hastily as possible in order to be out of range before he could light another match, I heard him say in a childish falsetto, "One—two—three for Monty!"

I did not hear what else he had to offer because I got out of ear shot as soon as possible. A few hundred yards on the trail back to the house Kent joined me. We proceeded Indian-fashion silently for a while.

Finally he ruminated, "It's damn queer how I forgot about her and him being on the island. If it hadn't been for them we was doing fine. I suppose we'll have to go back to the house and begin all over again."

"No more footprints," I insisted hastily. "We'll just hunt as plain amateur hunters and cut out the detective stuff."

Kent was visibly crestfallen. I don't think he cared particularly whether Mrs. Green was found or not, but he had derived a great deal of pleasure out of picturing himself as a sleuth hound, and just plain searching for an old lady lost in the woods did not appeal to him as being

much of a pastime for a damp drizzly morning.

It was beginning to get light—not bright enough to see anything, but that sort of a green mist which gives you a chill just to look at it. The cold of that morning will linger with me when I am broiling in the nethermost inferno. No sleep, no food, wet and cold. I tried to warm myself by thinking of how mad I was at Bopp, but even that was unsuccessful.

The sky had progressed in colour from gray to steel blue, also a nice frost-bitten colour, and we were splashing around the north shore of the island, when the muffled report of a gun reached our ears.

“They’ve found her,” said Kent without enthusiasm.

I assented.

“Let’s go back,” he suggested.

I hesitated. I hated to face Lucile after the ridiculous scene of a short time before, yet I could not leave her with the enemy continuously without admitting defeat. Besides, I had done and suffered as much for Mrs. Green’s sake as if I had been successful in finding her.

So we went back.

When we reached the house no one was in sight.

"Probably upstairs putting the old dame to bed," Kent said.

I went to the foot of the stairs and called softly, "Lucile."

There was no answer and I went up. I rapped on Mrs. Green's door and then entered. There was no sign of her. Somewhat puzzled, I went downstairs.

"Nobody there," I announced to Kent.

"That's funny. Must be around somewhere."

Just at that moment there was a sound outside and I looked out, to see Lucile and Bopp approaching. Lucile was pale and her eyes were sunken. Both she and Bopp were apparently dead tired and only just able to drag themselves up the steps and into the house.

"Well," sighed Lucile, "where's mother? In bed?"

"Where did you put her?" I countered.

"I?" exclaimed Lucile. "I haven't seen her."

"Haven't seen her?" Kent interjected.
"Then who fired the revolver?"

"Didn't you?" interposed Bopp.

"No."

"Who did then?" with sudden apprehension.

Kent picked up the gun from the table and broke it. Six loaded cartridges dropped out.

"This cannon ain't been fired," he said, sniffing the barrel.

We looked at one another with frightened eyes. What unseen force was playing pranks on us? First the disappearance of Mrs. Green, then the revolver shot coming out of the air. It seemed too much to account for by natural means.

When the telephone bell rang, our nerves, all on paper edge, gave one united leap. I answered the summons.

"Hello," I said.

"This is the telegraph operator at Fair View," said a masculine voice. "Have you got a party at your place named N. Blainey or something like that?"

"Yes, I am Mr. Blainey."

"Probably it's for you, then. We got a rush

message for N. Blainey which we can't deliver to you on account of the storm. Are you expecting anything?"

"Yes," I assented, "I am always getting telegrams. Read it to me over the telephone."

"I can't do that. I don't know you. You'll have to get Mr. Green or one of his family to take the message for you."

"Very well, hold the wire," I requested, putting my hand over the mouthpiece. "Lucile, will you take this telegram? It's for me, but they say they'll have to read it to some member of the family because they don't know me."

Lucile took the receiver, picked up a pencil hanging by a string to the telephone and wrote down the telegram on a scratch pad on the wall as the operator read it over the wire. When it was done, without comment she handed it to me.

It read as follows:

"N. Blaney:

"Coming to you at last. Arrive today. Have marriage license ready.

"VIDA DUNMORE."

“Wait,” I exclaimed, “this can’t be for me. Call up that operator again.”

“Don’t try to explain,” said Lucile coldly. “I suppose you don’t even know who Vida Dunmore is?”

I debated a moment as to whether I should lie or not, but what was the use? I did know a Vida Dunmore, an actress. In fact I had seen and criticized her work only the week before.

“Yes,” I said slowly, “I know her, or I know a girl by that name, but we are not friends. This telegram is a mistake.”

I saw that she did not believe me, but I had no chance to explain, because in an instant we had all jumped to our feet and were straining our overwrought nerves to catch a sound which punctuated the roar of the storm.

Somewhere near a revolver shot had been fired.

CHAPTER FIVE
ALONG CAME ROSALIND

CHAPTER FIVE

EVEN Kent's flagging interest revived. Unexplained revolver shots were more like the regular thing.

We all hastened out of doors.

"Do you suppose someone is shooting at mother?" Lucile worried.

I tried to reassure her, but my efforts were politely repulsed. Apparently the matter of the telegram had erected a wall of ice between us. Fortunately, that could easily be explained away as soon as I had time to get the telegraph operator on the wire again and discover for whom the message really was intended.

"It sounded as if it came from the beach." Kent pointed in the direction of the dock.

"No, I am sure it was inland," argued Bopp.

At heart I was inclined to agree with my rival, but rather than appear to do so I started for the water front.

Around a bank of bushes I came in full sight

of the lake. There was a comparatively quiet cove where the dock was, but just beyond a headland which sheltered the cove the waves were piling over themselves in boiling torrents where a sharp-toothed reef was hidden a couple of feet below the surface.

The explanation of the revolver shots was obvious. A small steamboat was jammed hard and fast on the rocks, and was pounding herself with a violence which prophesied a short life for her hull. Just as I appeared a man forward of the pilot house fired a revolver in the air. As soon as he saw me he began to wave his arms violently and pointed to three other figures crouched on the deck.

By this time the rest of our party had caught up with me.

"He seems to be signalling," Bopp interpreted sagely. "Wonder what he wants."

"What would you want if you were in a boat aground in the lake with every chance of going to pieces in ten minutes?" I yelled so as to be heard above the sea. "I suppose you would be wishing for some poached plover's eggs on a strip of toast."

"They can't expect us to come out there and get them," he decided. "No boat could live in that sea. It would be suicide to attempt to reach them."

"We must do something," Lucile decided, with ready sympathy. "I'm very fond of the captain. He's been bringing our supplies for ten years."

"Is that the supply boat?" Bopp demanded.

"Why, yes, certainly."

"We must do something at once." Bopp began to run around in busy circles in the sand. "We must attempt to reach the poor devils. Kent, where's that boat of yours?"

"I drew it up on the shore here, right alongside the dock—why, where is it?"

"Gone, eh?" Bopp shook his head knowingly. "Probably the heavy sea washed it off."

"Yes, but no sea ever untied the knot I had in her painter around this post here." Kent would have seen a mystery in Utopia. His mind insisted upon being pitted against the unknown.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Bopp said helplessly. "Those poor devils out there are

counting on us. Think of being on a vessel loaded with bread, butter, eggs, vegetables and meat, and having it break up under your feet. What shall we do?"

"I'm afraid we won't have time to do anything," I decided. "Her back is broken. It's only a question of seconds, now."

The people on board realized it too. They hastily launched a life raft over the side and scrambled on to it as the decks crumpled beneath them and became a twisted mass of timbers that writhed for a moment and fell back into the waves to become driftwood.

The raft, fortunately, had cleared the wreck in plenty of time and was now drifting past our cove toward the mainland. The men on board seemed busy arranging a sort of mast and sail made out of an oar and a couple of oilskins. When they got that rigged up, two of them held it up while a third attempted to steer with a second oar.

"They're going to try to land on the other point of the cove," Lucile said. "We must be there to help them when they come ashore. There are rocks about a hundred yards out

where the raft will strike if it isn't driven past."

She led off on a dog-trot which took the last tuck out of me when I attempted to follow. I got there some way, however, but minus the power of speech.

"Don't land here!" shouted Lucile into the teeth of the gale. "Dangerous rocks!"

She might as well have been whispering for all they could hear out there on that bobbing raft, besides, I imagined they would gladly have welcomed a rock or anything else fairly solid and substantial.

They discovered the rocks for themselves almost immediately and slid off from the raft in a compact group. The next few minutes passed rather rapidly. Under the direction of Kent, who had read a book about it somewhere, we formed ourselves into a life line by holding on to one another's hands and wading out into the surf. The sea was not running so high in the cove as it was outside or we could not have done this, but it was bad enough, besides being decidedly subnormal in temperature.

One by one the shipwrecked victims strug-

gled to us and were passed on up to the shore. Three were landed in this way, but the fourth failed to make it. I could see a head bobbing up and down a hundred feet from where I stood, but not coming nearer very rapidly.

All at once a particularly ugly little wave slapped me in the face. When I had shaken the water from my eyes I looked out to sea, but the head had disappeared altogether.

"That man can't swim. He's drowning!" Lucile shouted.

"I'll get him," I volunteered briefly.

"You'll be drowned yourself," Lucile protested.

"No, he won't," Bopp assured her. "Monty can swim like a turtle. I've often seen him in the tank at the Athletic Club."

I disengaged my hand from Kent, who was next to me in the line, and struck out for the spot where I had last seen the head. I am not a spectacular swimmer, but on account of my buoyancy I can keep up easily. So I take no credit for starting out after the fourth survivor. I was sure of getting back.

Fortunately I was in time. By a freak of

luck the body rose to the surface just in front of me and I grabbed it before it could sink again. It was a woman and I towed her easily by her hair. In a matter of five minutes I was again where I could stand. I turned and picked her up. She was still insensible.

It was not until I had almost reached shore that I noticed anything peculiar about the young woman who rested limply in my arms. I almost dropped her when I happened to glance down and discovered that she was clad in the silk tights, doublet and boots of Rosalind in "As You Like It."

CHAPTER SIX
LIPTON S. CLAIR

CHAPTER SIX
LITTON S. CLARK

CHAPTER SIX

LUCILE's gasp of astonishment when she saw what I had rescued was followed by an exclamation of womanly concern as she noticed the unconscious condition of my fair-haired burden.

"Is she drowned?" she asked.

I shook my head in answer. Explanations were not in order from me; I had less than a pint of wind left and I had to use it for breathing purposes.

"Just swallowed a little too much water, I guess," explained one of the men from the boat. "She'll be all right as soon as she gets a cup of hot coffee in her."

"Who is she, Captain Perkins, and why is she dressed that way?" asked Lucile, ignoring the reference to coffee.

"I dunno who she be," said the captain. "She come aboard at Buena Vista and said she was going to Fair View."

"Dressed like that?"

"No, sir, she was dressed swell. When we struck the rock over yonder I told her we might have to swim and she'd order dress just as light as possible. She went into the cabin with her grip and when she came out she was like this, and asked me if I calculated that was light enough. I 'lowed it was, and we didn't have no time for explanations, because just then we broke in two."

We made a rough stretcher and carried the unconscious girl to the house. Even wet and draggled, she was undeniably beautiful, and there was a soft line about the mouth that gave the lie to the absurd costume she had on. There was something about the face that I racked my brains to associate with a familiar name.

When we had placed her in an upstairs room we left her to Lucile's care and had a stag party in my bed-chamber. There were now six men of us.

Of the newcomers the captain was a tall, wiry old man with sharp, ferret, black eyes and a set of whiskers correctly trimmed for one

of the "natives" in "Shore Acres." I afterwards found out that he was not born to the sea, but had been a rural real estate agent most of his life. The steamer *Mary Bell* had become his property on a foreclosed mortgage and as he couldn't sell it to any advantage he had been obliged to operate it himself as a sort of ferry and supply boat for various places on the lake.

One of the other men, a green, lanky youngster, was obviously an employee on the boat. The other was just as obviously a passenger. The boatmen were inclined to take things philosophically and regard their escape as part of the day's work. The passenger was annoyed and uncomfortable under the indignities and inconveniences he had been made to suffer. He was not a fat man, but he had a build similar to mine before I started fasting. We like our comforts, we men of curves, and going without them makes us peeved.

I offered the passenger a suit of my clothes. "You're about my build," I suggested.

He looked at me with disfavor as if to say, "I hope not," but accepted just the same.

I told the captain and the other man I would outfit them with some of Mr. Green's old clothes. I rummaged the closets, but all I could find was a slightly moth-eaten suit of evening clothes and a red and white blazer. I had never suspected Mr. Green of owning anything as frivolous as that.

The captain possessed himself of the evening clothes and while he was putting them on I asked what had happened.

"I didn't have no business putting out," he replied, "but that good-looking girl there seemed in an awful sweat to get to Fair View, and old as I be, I let her hornswoggle me. My biler were not in first-class shape, in fact I may say that some of her flues was constructed on the general principle of a doughnut, which is more hole than anything else. Jim, here, my engineer, ain't a regular engineer, being as how he learned by correspondence, but I hired him because he's one of the best cooks in the State. He must have done something wrong—"

The other man tried to interrupt.

"I know," the captain brushed him verbally

one side, "but you must have done something. Anyhow we plumb lost our steam completely. Drowned the fires too. Afore we could do anything we straddled the rocks out here and you know the rest. Now if you want a rattling good cup of coffee and some bacon and eggs just turn Jim loose in the kitchen even with them star spangled clothes on and set back with a napkin tucked under your chin."

I looked at Bopp and Bopp looked at Kent, who grinned.

"There ain't any coffee," he announced, "and there ain't any bacon and eggs."

"Well, anything will do, even tea."

"There ain't anything."

"What?" The passenger was on his feet in an instant. "Nothing to eat?"

"Not a thing."

"Good heavens," he raved, "we'll all starve. I am positively faint with hunger now. What shall I do?"

"Why don't you try fainting?" suggested Bopp amiably.

"Besides I have an important engagement in Fair View," continued the passenger. "A

friend of mine wired me that he was going to be married there this morning and I must prevent him."

"Prevent him?" I said enquiringly.

"Yes, marriage as an institution may be all right for the average intellect, but a man like Ned Blaney must not tie his genius down to the height attainable by a woman."

"Ned Blaney," I repeated. "That telegram must have been for him."

"Is there a telephone?" enquired the passenger.

"There is."

We escorted him to it in a body.

Over the wire he asked for the best hotel in Fair View. That was a cinch for the operator. In New York it might have been harder.

"Hello."

"Is Mr. N. Blaney registered there?"

"Thank you. Will you see if he is in his room?"

"Just gone out? When he comes in will you

please tell him to call up—" He turned to us. "What is the number of this telephone?"

"Tell him to call up Green's Island," I answered.

"Hello, tell Mr. Blaney to call up Green's Island and ask for Mr. Lipton S. Clair. Good-bye."

After he had hung up the receiver there was silence for a few moments, then Bopp, in a tone of repressed emotion enquired, "May I ask if you are Mr. Lipton S. Clair?"

"Yes."

"The famous novelist and magazine writer?"

"I'd hardly say that, although I suppose my work is more or less widely known."

"And you," continued Bopp, checking off on his fingers, "feel faint from hunger and think that you will starve to death if you don't get food?"

"Is there anything strange in that?"

Bopp said nothing, but picked up a magazine which Lucile had left opened face downward on the table, and handed it to Mr. Clair. He looked at it for a moment and then smiled.

"I remember when I wrote this. It was over a year ago. It's a bully theory, isn't it?"

"Didn't you ever try it?"

"Why, no. I've never had time. I've always wanted to meet someone who had made the experiment to see if I was right."

"You have met them," I thundered in the tones of a judge, "and you need not ask about the result of the experiment, because you are going to try it yourself."

A burst of applause greeted me from Bopp.

"'Eating three meals a day is a habit,'" I quoted. "'We have made tyrants of our stomachs. They demand to be fed every so often, and if we answer that demand we are slaves.'"

Lipton S. Clair groaned.

I explained how we had sent our supplies and cook away so that we should not be tempted.

"And when do you expect to receive more supplies?" he enquired.

"You were on the boat which was bringing the groceries," I informed him.

"Then they are out there in the lake?"

I nodded.

He grabbed a hat (mine, I discovered after it had blown into a mud-puddle), and rushed out.

"Where are you going?" Kent yelled.

"To save some of those groceries," said the distinguished author.

This was such a wonderful idea that we all followed him, Kent, more thoughtful than the rest, pausing to get a clothes line from the shed.

It was still too rough to go out to where the *Mary Bell* had gone down even if we had possessed a boat, but boxes and crates of groceries, fruits and vegetables were still streaming past the leeward point of the cove.

We spent two hours trying to lasso these packages. Only one throw netted us anything and when we had opened the case we towed in, we found three dozen boxes of wet matches.

After the last crate had bobbed serenely by, nodding us a friendly farewell, we sighed and returned to the house.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FIVE FRIDAYS

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE END

CHAPTER SEVEN

"How soon can I get away?" Clair asked Captain Perkins as we straggled up the path.

"That sea out there," mused the captain, "don't look like it had any intention of quitting for a couple of days anyhow."

"Then what can I do?"

"Jest set."

"Stay here?"

"You guessed it."

Clair walked on in silence for a moment, then he voiced his thoughts thus: "I believe I can make copy out of this experience. I'll be a second Robinson Crusoe."

"'Pears to me," debated the captain, "that you got an awful lot of society for a Robinson Crusoe. Seems like I recollect this fellow Crusoe had only one nigger to wait on him."

"His man, Friday," interpolated Bopp.

"That's the one. If you don't count the

women and the dog there's six human souls on this island."

"That won't make any difference." I came to the rescue. "Every first-class 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' show nowadays has two Topsys and two little Evas at least. We'll have one Robinson Crusoe and five Fridays."

"That's a good idea," assented Clair, enthusiastically following up the scheme with details. "I'll get a bell and whenever I want anything I'll ring for you."

"Fine," agreed Bopp, who began to see possibilities in the scheme. "We'll get you a lot of musical bells so that the ringing won't annoy us any if you keep it up for some time."

"Maybe I could rig up an electric chime," Kent suggested with an eye to mechanical details of which he alone was master. "We'd have to each have a number and only answer our own note on the chime. For instance, 'do' would call for the gink who was Friday No. 1; that would be the captain here."

"Let me be Friday the thirteenth," Bopp continued, "and Jim, the galley mechanic, can be Black Friday. Kent, you're Good Friday—

you get a hot cross bun. What shall I baptize you, Monty? I can't think of any more Fridays."

"Let me be Ash Wednesday. I don't care much for fish anyway."

By this time we had reached the house.

Lucile greeted us downstairs in the living-room.

"Miss Dunmore is waiting for you."

I looked around to see whom she was addressing.

"I mean you, Mr. Blainey."

"Who is Miss Dunmore?"

"The lady whose life you saved. Do you mean to say that you didn't recognize her with those—things on?"

"I assure you that I don't know what you mean."

"That's right," said Bopp. "No matter what you say, we'll all of us agree that it's true. We men must stick together. Monty never saw the lady before."

This was especially despicable on the part of Bopp, as he knew as well as I did that the tele-

gram had been for the other Blaney whom Clair had spoken of.

"I certainly never did."

"How about this, then?" enquired Lucile sweetly, handing me a damp newspaper clipping. "She had that in her hand all the time."

I took the paper gingerly and looked at it in amazement. It was my own criticism of a production of "As You Like It," which had been staged the week before. One paragraph was marked with a blue pencil and read as follows:

"The fashionable audience which assembled to see Miss Langland as Rosalind was obviously disappointed when the management announced that Miss Langland was indisposed and that her understudy would play the part. Before the first act was over, however, the discriminating ones in front knew that they had been present at the birth of a new star. The management need never again offer excuses for presenting Miss Vida Dunmore as Rosalind. The public had never dreamed that Rosalind could be as physically perfect as Miss

Dunmore made us see her. Shakespeare could never have written the part had he seen Miss Dunmore's figure. He would have known that Rosalind in tights could not for an instant deceive Orlando as to her sex. It is impossible to say more than that the part and the boots have never been more perfectly filled. Miss Dunmore comes from a famous theatrical family and neither her Cousin Ethel nor her Uncle Jack need fear that the family laurels will fade in Miss Dunmore's possession. Her voice has the soft note of the thrush which seems too sweet to be heard by an entire audience."

I had written in a burst of enthusiasm over a perfect bit of artistry. I take pride in my work and like to praise the thing well done as well as censure lack of adroitness. Taken away from the context of the review, however, the paragraph did sound a trifle eulogistic.

"He read the clipping," said Bopp, "then sank into a chair by the club window and ordered brandy and soda. He might just as well have ordered ham and eggs, which are more nourishing."

"Hadn't you better go up and see her?"

urged Lucile. "She is conscious now and she seemed so pleased when I told her you were here. I didn't tell her that you were the one who rescued her. I thought she would prefer to hear that from your own lips."

If I had known as much then as I do now about girl psychology, I could have read jealousy into every word Lucile spoke and it would have comforted me a lot. As it was, I let her drive me upstairs and into the room occupied by Miss Dunmore.

I entered alone. Dressed in one of Lucile's negligées she was propped up in bed. My dramatic criticism was right. She was pretty. There was a veil of charm about her such as one expects to find around a convent-bred girl who knows nothing of the world. At first I was at a loss to account for it.

She looked at me enquiringly.

"Did you wish to see me?" I asked.

"You are Mr. Green?" she hesitated. "No? I have seen no one except the lady and I didn't understand whether she said Miss or Mrs."

Her voice lost none of its quality through

not being heard over the footlights. It vibrated like the "G" string on a violin.

"Miss Green it is," I informed her. "She said you wanted to see me. I'm Mr. Blainey."

"Not the playwright?"

"No, the dramatic critic."

"I knew you didn't look like Ned Blaney. You see, I'm engaged to him and I ought to know what he looks like unless I'm delirious. What dramatic critic are you?"

"I'm the only one who is not the author of an unproduced play."

"I'm sorry you're a critic. I don't like critics, except one. I had a clipping that he wrote about me that was the one thing that I saved from the wreck. I'd show it to you, but Miss Green borrowed it."

"This is it." I handed her the water soaked fragment of paper.

"Did you read it?" she exclaimed with girlish enthusiasm. "Isn't he a dear?"

"Thank you," I murmured.

"Are you *that* dramatic critic?" she demanded, sitting bolt upright in bed and holding out her hands to me.

My impulse was to take her in my arms just as anyone would pick up a child, but I knew she did not intend anything like that, so I took both her hands instead.

Just at that moment someone rapped and Miss Dunmore said, "Come in."

Lucile entered, saw our handclasp, blushed and stammered, "I didn't mean to intrude."

"Intrude? Not a bit of it," chattered the other. "I want to thank you for sending this adorable man up to me. I think I've been in love with him ever since he wrote that article in the paper about me last week."

Of course she meant as much by that as you mean when you say that you just love ice-cream soda or buckwheat pancakes with sausage, or whatever it is that you do just love, but to Lucile it verified all that she had suspected. With one scornful glance at me she left the room with a murmured excuse about finding some clothing for Miss Dunmore to put on.

That look from Lucile would have spoiled for me the brightest day that ever was minted, but the young lady had not noticed it.

"I wonder why she didn't stay," she mused.

"I'm afraid she doesn't like me. I wonder if it is on account of the clothes I wore. It was just an accident that I had them in my grip. Ned—that's my fiancé, you know—thought I looked well in that costume, so I was always going to keep it, even after I was an old married woman with ten children. I wonder if the water will hurt it?"

I told her I thought it would be all right when it was dried.

"The captain said my tailored skirt was too heavy to swim in, and told me to take it off. I did—and put my costume on instead. Was it too dreadful?"

The naïveté of this youngster was beyond belief. In this day when so many hammer throwers, mostly women, are writing novels of the stage in which the actresses are always depicted as all that they should not be, it may be difficult to convince the reading public that there are girls in the profession who are as ignorant of viciousness as a farmer's daughter. This is more apt to be true, as in Miss Dunmore's case, of the younger generation of a great theatrical family. A girl born to the

footlights thinks nothing of the unconventionalities which charm and shock the newcomer. To her, they are the accepted thing; it is the conventions of life that appear strange. With the first-class artistic connections which were her heritage, Miss Dunmore had an assured position in the theatrical world as soon as she entered it and so was not at the mercy of the managers and agents who prey on the ambitious young girls beginning in the profession and convince them that without their aid advancement is impossible. It may be that from this you can understand why Vida Dunmore was as sweet and girlish in heart and soul as you would expect your sister or daughter to be.

Soon Kent came up with a bundle of clothes for Miss Dunmore from Miss Green, and promising to wait for her downstairs I excused myself and went in search of Lucile.

I found Captain Perkins and Jim, a nondescript picture in the evening clothes and blazer suit, wandering ill at ease about the living-room. I asked for Miss Green.

"She went out with that other young man," said the captain. "She said she was going to

look for her mother." I had almost forgotten the missing Mrs. Green. I was about to start out searching again when I remembered my promise to Miss Dunmore.

"And where is Mr. Clair?" I asked.

"I seen him out in the yard looking for walnuts under them hard maple trees," volunteered Jim. "I didn't tell him they weren't a nut-bearing tree on this island. What's the use? It ain't nutting time yet nohow."

Miss Dunmore came downstairs in a dress of Lucile's, or rather a blouse and skirt of the sailor-suit order. She seemed very little ruffled by her adventure on the high seas.

"Where is Miss Green?" she asked, looking around. "I want to thank her for her kindness."

"She is out searching for her mother." That sounded like a foolish statement, so I qualified it. "Her mother disappeared last night during the storm."

"Oh!" Miss Dunmore did not seem particularly impressed. "I don't see how any one could get lost on a little island like this."

"That's where the mystery comes in. There

are only about half a dozen places she could be and we've looked in all of them."

"I had a brother who walked in his sleep," said Captain Perkins, following up a train of thought suggested by Mrs. Green's disappearance. "Do you want to hear the story about the funny place where the zebra bit him?"

"A little later," I suggested hastily. "Just now we all ought to scatter and help look for Mrs. Green."

"How was she dressed?" Captain Perkins enquired.

"I don't know. I'm not sure whether she was dressed at all or not—that is—she probably had on a kimono or something, but I don't think she had on regular skirts and things."

"We might take a stroll along the beach," suggested Jim, whom I suspected of wanting to display his striped clothing in public. "Possibly we might find something we could eat."

After the captain and Jim had started out Miss Dunmore seemed lost in deep and bewildered thought. I forebore to break in on so portentous a brain struggle.

At last she spoke. "Where do you suppose

the zebra did bite Captain Perkins' brother?"

"If you go with him perhaps he will tell you," I said, with an idea of doing my searching alone with a weather eye constantly peeled for Lucile and Bopp.

"No," she demurred, "I would much rather go hunting with you. It will be more fun."

Evidently she thought that hunting old ladies in the underbrush was one of our innocent island pastimes.

I sighed. We sallied forth. If I had wanted to run across Lucile when I was alone I was just as anxious to avoid her while I was in the company of Miss Dunmore.

"Do we have to find her before lunch?"

I explained painstakingly the remote possibility either of finding Mrs. Green or of having any lunch. Contrary to my expectations she took the information about the lack of food just as cheerfully as she had everything else. I don't believe it would be possible to dampen the spirits of that girl. Not that she was unresponsive to another's distress, for I have rarely met one so sympathetic, but she was persistently optimistic.

"I don't mind going without lunch a bit," she smiled. "I very seldom eat anything until after the show at night anyway. Only there won't be any show to-night to eat after, will there? That will seem funny. I've always been in shows ever since I was a kid, except a few weeks in the middle of summer, and then generally I was rehearsing."

She laughed gaily.

"But I love it. I wonder how it will seem after I am married to Ned. About eight-fifteen every night I suppose I'll be straining my ears for some invisible orchestra to pound out an overture. That always thrills me and puts me on my toes. When the overture begins, it's like kicking aside a plank that connects you with the real world. You're committed to another life—a three hour existence where the sunlight is turned off and on by a little man up on a bridge, and where the green grass and the flowers smell only of musty paint, overheated by electricity. I wonder where I can find something in real life, in your world, that will smell like scenery. I doubt whether I can get along without it."

She had carried on this monologue while we walked along the shore. When I had suggested that we search inland she had very properly objected on the grounds that she was apt to get her feet wet. It had stopped raining temporarily, so that the beach was fairly dry, although a trifle windy and very noisy on account of the breaking of the waves on the rocks just off the shore.

Vida chattered away with all the heedless gaiety of a child who knows that someone is going to provide the next meal. She told me at length about her fiancé. That took a lot of the romance out of our walk. Not that I was falling in love with Vida. Not a bit of it. But it was too bad as long as I had lost favor with Lucile on her account, to have her tell me about her love affair with someone else. I have since reasoned that she regarded me as being old enough to be her father or her Uncle Jack, and treated me accordingly. Nothing bores a man, I find, so much as girlish confidences about some other male being who is apparently perfect.

"I wouldn't mind being all alone with you

on this island," she confided, "if you were only Jack."

"Jack? Who is Jack?"

"I mean Ned," she explained. "I was going to marry Jack, but Ned wouldn't have it. We wouldn't care much about food, even," she went on. "Ned would find something for me. He's dreadfully ingenious. That comes from writing plays, I guess. One has to be clever to think out plots for plays, don't you think?"

"Not most of them." I lapsed into my critical manner. "Not as clever as you have to be to sell them."

"He wrote a play once about two people on a desert island." Vida's eye kindled as she recollected it. "There was a bully part for the girl in it. They found bananas and cocoanuts to eat and some kind of birds' eggs."

"In plays and stories dealing with castaways on an island," I explained, "the scene is always conveniently located on a tropical island where all sorts of food products grow wild. May I ask if in Mr. Blaney's play there was any treasure buried on the island?"

"Yes," she assented.

"And were they attacked by savages armed with poisoned darts?"

"Oh, you've read his play!"

"No, but I know just what ought to be in every castaway story. This island that we are on, you see, is quite different. Nothing more nourishing than spruce-gum ever grows here and there isn't a native with a poisoned dart within a thousand miles, unless you count Lucile."

"What do you mean by that?"

I did not answer. An idea had germinated from something she had said. There was a natural food resource on the island. I might be able to develop it quietly by myself and then if it was successful, confer it, as a boon, on the entire community.

When we were about two-thirds of the way around the island and approximately a quarter of a mile from home, a sharp stinging patter of raindrops drove us to shelter. There was a small lattice summer-house on a high part of the island overlooking the lake nearby, and we hastened toward it. In our path, between the sandy beach and the higher bank, was a shal-

low strip of water which had been left there by the highest waves of the night before and had been augmented by the rain. Vida looked in dismay from her white shoes to the muddy water.

"I never can cross it," she wailed. "These are Miss Green's shoes and I must not ruin them."

"We've got to get under cover," I argued.

"You could carry me across," she suggested practically; "that is, if you can lift me."

"I carried you further than that this morning."

"Were you the brave man who risked his life for me?" she exclaimed impulsively, then added with naïve conceit, "I know Ned can never thank you enough. Just pick me up in your big strong arms and put me down the minute we get across."

So she gathered her skirts carefully about her and I picked her up easily and splashed through the puddle. Then just because she insisted upon being put down immediately I carried her on further and laughing and struggling we entered the summer-house.

Lucile and Bopp were there.

I stood a moment in stupefied silence. My luck would bring tears to an oculist's advertisement. I put Vida down.

"It started to rain," I stammered, "and we had to hunt up shelter. Miss Dunmore was so afraid of spoiling your clothes."

"That's all right," said Lucile sweetly; "I don't mind their being wrinkled a bit. I'm going to have that suit pressed anyway."

"I didn't mean that," I explained, after the fashion of any man floundering in the net of a woman's sarcasm. "I only meant she didn't want the rain to spoil them."

"Why, that's what I meant, too," responded Lucile, in wide eyed innocence. "What else could you have thought I meant?"

I blushed and held my tongue.

"I do not suppose you have anything favorable to report about mother?"

"No," I rejoined shortly.

"Nor we," sighed Lucile.

"Nothing could have happened to her," cheered Vida. "We'll find her curled up somewhere fast asleep."

The picture of Mrs. Green, dormant in a hollow tree, like a squirrel, made even Lucile smile.

"I don't believe you have met Mr. Bopp yet," said Lucile. "At least you were not conscious when you first saw each other."

"What name did you say?"

"Mr. Bopp, my fiancé."

"Your fiancé?" I ejaculated.

"Yes." Lucile turned to me. "I wanted to tell you two the first ones. I knew you would appreciate our happiness."

My mind refused to grasp this disaster. It could not be, that was all. I had never seriously considered Bopp as running even a very dangerous second.

My mind puzzling over Lucile's statement, I heard Vida's clear soft voice saying, "Mr. Bopp, I am pleased—why, aren't you called 'Boppy'?"

"Boppy?" repeated Lucile curiously.

"Yes, don't you call him that? All the girls in the 'Show Girl' company did. I was in the chorus then. We used to regard him as almost one of the company, he was around with us so

much. We had a good time that season," she added reflectively.

Lucile murmured, "I should imagine so."

I presume Bopp's stock sank about one thousand per cent. Vida did not realize the damage she was doing and prattled on. It meant nothing to her that Bopp had been a hanger-on at stage doors. In her world that was the only interesting place to be, that is, if you couldn't be before the footlights. The man who went around with the company was the natural sort of male, the one who didn't, to her, must have seemed the freak of the species.

I was glad to let Bopp be the centre of attention for the time being, while I railed inwardly at a fate which had twice placed me in a false position that morning.

"I know you will be happy," Vida was saying. "I've been engaged a good many times and I enjoy it more every time."

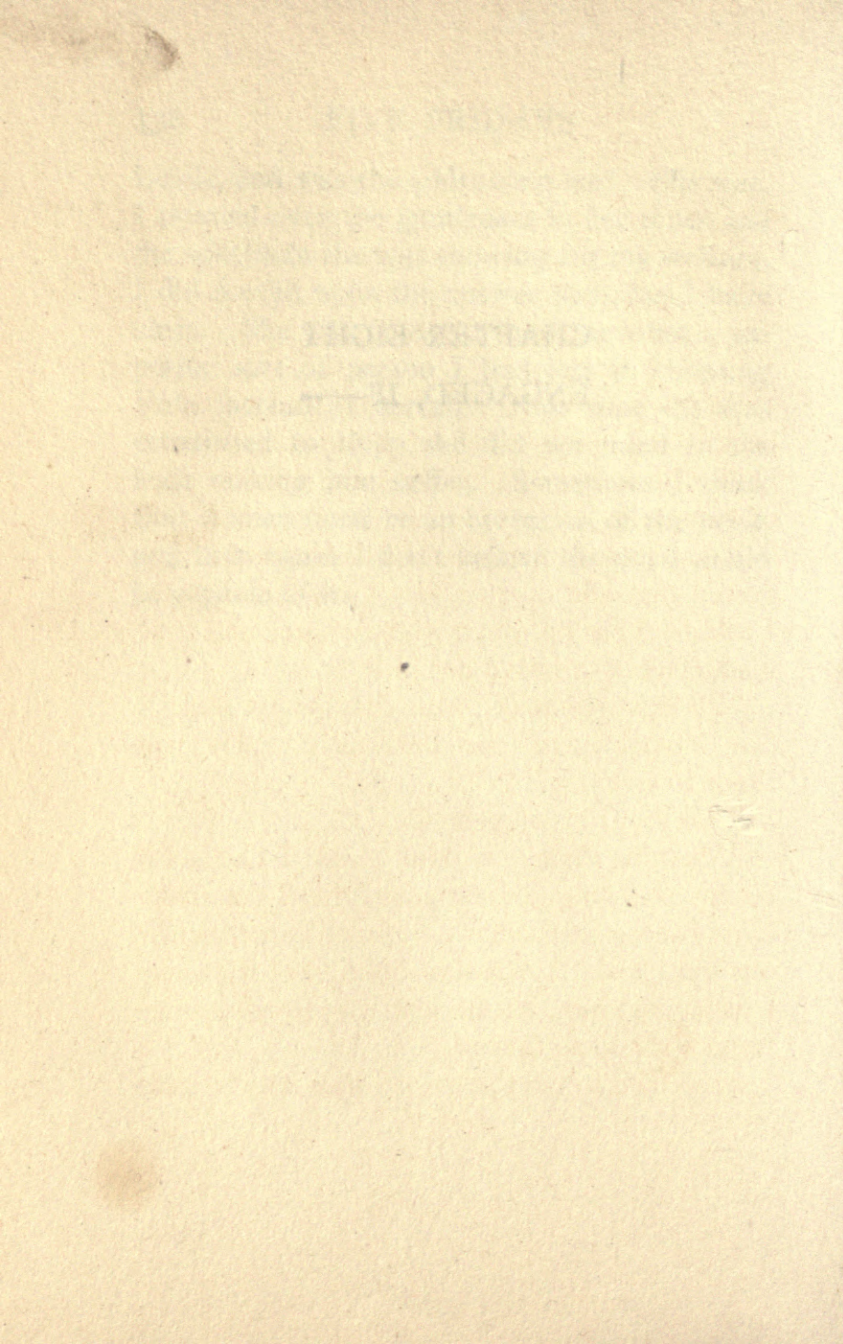
"You must be terribly tired, Monty," I heard Lucile say; "no sleep for thirty-six hours and no food for three days. I wish that there were something that I could do for you."

I listened in amazement. Could this be

Lucile, and was she addressing me? She was. I puzzled over the gentleness in her tones and the solicitude she was showing for my welfare. I did not hit upon the answer then, but I have since. She was going to show me what a superior sort of person I had lost in choosing Vida instead of herself. Now that she was committed to Bopp she did not mind in the least making him suffer. Sometimes I think that women must be an invention of the devil, and then again I don't believe the devil would be capable of it.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

ENGAGED, IF——



CHAPTER EIGHT

AFTER awhile the rain let up and we went back to the house to see what the others might have discovered and to lay some definite plan of campaign.

Vida elected to stay out of doors, and I suggested that she take on Mr. Clair for a walk. I told her that he was a woman hater and thus inadvertently aroused her interest.

"I'll have to make him change his ideas." She looked up at me innocently. "Do you think I can do it?"

"Ask him," I suggested.

"Meaning that you don't think I can. I'll bet my seal ring against yours that I can make him propose before dark. Mine is a very curious one, too. A Russian duke gave it to me. I never met him, but he sent it to my dressing-room with some flowers."

It seemed to me to be a possible way to gain

a little solitude for reflection and I assented to the wager.

"You don't intend to tell him, then, that you are engaged already?"

"Oh, no, not until he proposes. Of course, I might like him better than I do Ned. Then I'd never tell him."

I could see that Ned Blaney was going to have the time of his life immediately after he found himself hitched more or less for life to this volatile young person. Vida was not one of those who would pass by an inviting pasture lot simply because she was in harness.

The rest of us went into the house. As we came in the telephone was ringing. Asking Lucile's permission I answered it.

"Hello."

"Hello," said a male voice speaking with staccato sharpness. "May I speak to Mr. Lipton S. Clair?"

I put my hand over the mouth-piece and turned around. Lucile had gone upstairs but Bopp was gazing idly out of the window.

"Is Mr. Clair still there in the yard?" I asked him.

"No. He went off down the beach with Miss Dunmore."

"Hello." I spoke again into the telephone. "Mr. Clair was here a moment ago but he has just gone for a walk with a young lady."

"What?"

"He has just gone for a walk with a young lady."

"Impossible!" The voice at the other end shot that emphatically at me.

"It's so."

"Clair is a woman-hater."

"What if he is? This one is going to convert him."

"Humph." It sounded as if the party were sniffing in my ear. "She can't do it. Who is she?"

"Her name is Miss Vida Dunmore."

"Vida Dunmore?"

"That's what I said."

"Vida Dunmore there?"

"Certainly."

"Thank heaven," he ejaculated fervently. "I've been waiting for hours for her to get here. How does she come to be there?"

I explained to the young man, who proved to be Ned Blaney, as I had already suspected, all about the wreck of the *Mary Bell* and the casting ashore of her passengers.

"Thanks very much," said Blaney with considerable relief in his voice. "I'll come right over after her. Don't tell her that I called up and I will surprise her. Good-bye."

He hung up before I could tell him that he probably couldn't get any kind of a boat to come over to the island, but I judged that he would find that out soon enough for himself.

"Where's Miss Green?" I asked Bopp.

"I advised her to lie down for a little while and rest. This search is wearing her out. She is leaving everything in my charge."

"I presume that congratulations are in order," I said, extending my hand with as good a show of cordiality as I could muster. "I do congratulate you, Mr. Bopp."

"We're not regularly engaged," Bopp said sourly. "She has promised to be mine if I can find her mother. That makes me just about as near engaged to her as if we had never met."

So Lucile's promise had a string tied to it. My heart leaped exultantly. There was a chance yet.

"Let's have a drink on the strength of your engagement anyway," I said, starting toward the kitchen.

"Water?" queried Bopp, hoping against hope.

"Why, yes."

"No, thanks. My tummie is looking for Mount Ararat now." He sank disconsolately into a seat. In a moment he rose wearily. "I've got to start out again. I promised Lucile I would search while she rested."

Hardly had he left the house when the telephone rang again. I answered it.

"Hello."

"Hello. Is that you, Mr. Blainey? Will you call Lucile to the telephone? I want to——"

The voice ceased abruptly.

"Hello," I called, "hello, hello!"

There was no answer.

The voice I had just been listening to was that of Mrs. Green.

CHAPTER NINE
FOUND BY 'PHONE

CHAPTER NINE

AFTER awhile I got Central's attention and demanded to be told why I had been cut off.

"That party called up from a private telephone," said Central sweetly. "She had no right to use it. It is a summer telephone only and the instrument is to be taken out next week."

"But it was Mrs. Green who was talking."

"It couldn't be," Central was positive. "You are speaking from Mrs. Green's residence yourself."

"It was Mrs. Green. I recognized her voice."

"Just a minute." There was a pause, then, "Hello. That party called up from Huntingdon's. What could Mrs. Green be doing there on a stormy day like this?"

I could not explain to a gossipy telephone operator what had really happened to Mrs. Green. I did not know much about it myself

and the few facts of her disappearance that I was cognizant of would hardly sound well if repeated.

"Mrs. Green," I hazarded, "went out walking, and I suppose she stopped in at Mr. Huntingdon's."

"Do you know," asked Central, "that Huntingdon's is on a small island three miles south of where you are and three miles from the mainland? The walking is not very good."

I felt as if I had stepped off into space from a high platform. "Probably—that is—the chances are—" I floundered, "—the chances are that she decided to row and the wind may have carried her out of her way."

I finally persuaded Central to call up Huntingdon's. I think it was curiosity that made her relent. I could be sure that she would be listening to whatever might be said by Mrs. Green and myself.

After a few minutes a voice answered the call.

"Hello."

"Hello, Mrs. Green. This is Mr. Blainey."

"Hello, Mr. Blainey." There was a ring of

ladylike indignation in her voice. "Can you explain to me, Mr. Blainey, how I happened to find myself in a row-boat out in the middle of the lake, wearing my red silk dress and a night-cap tied under one ear?"

"Wait a minute, Mrs. Green, Central is listening."

"I don't care. She always does. She probably wants to know just as much as I do. What happened? Was there an earthquake? I remember the island was sort of wobbly and hard to walk on."

"No, there wasn't any earthquake," I answered. "We were fasting, you remember?"

"Yes, I remember that, but I'm not any more. The first thing I did when I landed was to break into this house and cook myself a can of baked beans. It's funny if there wasn't any earthquake. I remember the floor of the house all running in funny little waves."

"I'm afraid our time must be nearly up," I suggested in the hope of turning the conversation. "Central will cut us off."

"No, I won't," interposed a third voice, the sweetly professional one of the operator.

"Talk all you want to. There ain't anybody waiting for the line."

"I suppose I must have got into the boat when the earthquake commenced," persisted Mrs. Green, "but how did I get on the décolleté red dress? And where did I get the night-cap? I haven't worn that dress for ten years."

I told her that we would have to wait until she got home to explain a number of things. "Lucile will be very glad to know that you are safe," I added casually as if she had just gone over to a neighbor's, hoping to deceive Central. "She was afraid you might get wet."

"Did Lucile know I was going?" enquired the startled Mrs. Green, who apparently did not catch on to my acting.

"No, not until after you had started," I said, skirting the edge of the truth neatly. "She will be very glad to hear that you are all right. I'll tell her as soon as she wakes up. She is resting now."

"Sleeping? Now? What for?"

"Why," I explained, "she was up all night."

"What? And all alone on that island with you two young fellows and no chaperone!"

"Oh, no," I hastened to reassure her and Central. "Not alone with us. There are a lot of people here, six or seven I should say."

"Holding a convention of earthquake sufferers, I suppose," Mrs. Green surmised caustically. "What sort of people are they?"

"Oh, very nice people," I answered promptly. "One of them is a lady."

"How do you know she is a lady?" enquired Mrs. Green. "Just because she happened to be wearing skirts when she arrived?"

"Oh, no," I said hastily. How could I tell this elderly dignified lady that our feminine guest had not worn skirts on her arrival.

"Humph." Mrs. Green was not particularly impressed. "The sooner I get back the better. You'll have to send someone over after me because there weren't any oars in the boat I came in. I wouldn't go out in a rowboat again anyway. Send a big boat or I won't leave here."

"I'll send for you just as soon as I can." I was glad to have the conversation draw to a close. It had been bad enough already, but who could tell what else might come out if

we kept on talking. "The storm ought to quiet down soon now. Good-bye for the present."

"Wait a minute, I want to ask—"

I am afraid I was guilty of rank discourtesy in hanging up the receiver before I heard her question, but I knew I should be unable to answer it anyway, and I had to have an opportunity to think what it was all about.

First of all Lucile must be told and an end put to her anxiety. I went upstairs and called, "Lucile."

There was no answer and I stepped to the door of her room, which stood open. She was lying on her bed, dressed, with her head on her arm sleeping the dead sleep of utter exhaustion. Nature demands her toll of a healthy body even in times of utmost mental distress. She seemed very small and childish and her fingers curled adorably, like a baby's. I didn't have the heart to waken her so I tiptoed out. The news would be just as welcome when she wakened of her own accord and sleep would probably do her more good for the time being.

When I came downstairs I saw Bopp go through the yard, looking under every bush and into every gully. I went out to tell him that Mrs. Green was located.

He stopped when he saw me approaching.

"I see Clair has cut you out with your actress friend," he said. "I saw them arm in arm on the beach a minute ago. There's no use talking, Monty, you can't seem to hold a girl's attention long enough to slip a ring on her. Why don't you try avertising in one of those matrimonial papers?"

I made no answer but turned around abruptly and went back to the house. I don't suppose he was particularly happy, and hunger and fatigue may have loosened his tongue, but I was angry enough myself to let him hunt until the crack of doom before I would tell him that Mrs. Green was found.

When I entered the house the telephone was ringing again. I took off the receiver.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," said a masculine voice. "I am a newspaper man, representing the Haniman Syndicate. I understand that you had an

earthquake over there this morning, and that Mrs. Green, the wife of the president of the First National Bank, made her escape in an aeroplane dressed in a spangled, red ball-gown. I want to know if I have these facts absolutely correct before I—”

I carefully lowered the receiver until it hung suspended from the wires, and tip-toed away from the telephone letting him talk to the empty air.

The story was out.

CHAPTER TEN
THE CLAM HUNTER

CHAPTER TEN

WHEN I went out, after leaving the reporter holding the wire, so to speak, Tootles begged to go with me and I let her out. Who am I to deny the pleasures of liberty to a fellow creature no matter if her knowledge of language is confined to wig-wagging with a short, stumpy tail? From the way she raced off up the beach and conducted imaginary skirmishes with every prominent bush or rock I inferred that she was not ordinarily allowed to consult her own wishes about staying indoors.

Dogs are supposed to be faithful companions to man in his dark hours, but this one was just about as faithful and companionable as a grasshopper. In the pictures the faithful hound puts his nose on his bereaved master's lap looking up at him with great devoted eyes that mutely offer unselfish and unquestioning love. Anyone attempting that pose with Tootles must first consult a taxidermist.

All of which is by way of saying that we became separated and lost, especially Tootles. I whistled and otherwise implored the little devil to come to me. I even mentioned her as a "nice doggie," out loud, with a muttered "damn" beneath my breath.

After awhile I gave it up. It isn't dignified for two hundred pounds or more of man to chase ten pounds or less of dog. I reflected that she could not have gone very far and would probably return to the house anyway. I only hoped that Lucile would sleep until Tootles, tired of hunting imaginary prey in the underbrush, would come home. Chasing game is a futile pastime for Tootles. If a good husky rabbit ever met her in a pasture lot and said "Boo" to her, Tootles would expire of fright. I think it's a shame the way dogs have been converted into costume accessories by women. However, I do not think it wise to express myself fully on this subject.

When I had definitely given Tootles up I turned my attention to the undeveloped food supply which I had discovered earlier when walking with Vida. There were hundreds of

fresh water clams on the beach and it was possible to dig them in the cove when the water was not particularly rough. I spent the afternoon wading, compensated for the cold discomfort of the performance by the thought that, by providing food, I would win back a large share of the favor I had lost with Lucile. Not that she would admit that she needed food. Not she. No complaint had left her lips, but I knew that the sight of a soda cracker would make her break down and weep like a child. I knew because I felt that way myself.

Vida and Lipton S. Clair strolled by while I was wading.

"Are you still looking for Mrs. Green?" Clair called out, as I fished under water cautiously.

"No," I replied shortly, "I am teaching a pet fish to swim."

"You look as though you were taking one of those barefoot cures."

"I didn't know you could cure bare feet," supplied Vida. "By the way, Mr. Blainey, does your ring come off easily?"

"It would from your hand. Do you wish to wear it?"

"Oh, no, not yet—not until I am entitled to. You can begin to work it off though."

"Did anyone call me up on the telephone?" asked Mr. Clair.

"Yes," I said.

"Why didn't you call me?" he demanded crossly. "I haven't been far away."

The self-assurance of this man enraged me. Here he was, an uninvited guest, complaining that he was not paged as he would have been in a hotel. I wondered where he got his ideas of the social relations of modern people. Who could have spoiled him so? Sometimes the adulation of women will put an ego on the bias that way, but Clair was a professed woman-hater. I only hope that some day he will write a play which it will be my pleasure to review.

I explained in words of one syllable that I had not called him because I did not know where he was, had a sore throat, was under physician's orders not to call anyone, my mother had trained me not to yell at strangers,

and besides I never did any calling except on Thursdays.

Vida pointed her finger at me for shame the way children do and led him away before I could think of anything more.

"Ned says," she smiled at me as they went on up the beach, "that heaven is a place where there are no dramatic critics."

"You tell him from me," I retorted, "that he knows more about heaven now than he ever will from actual experience. Unless," I added, "the girl he is engaged to actually marries him."

She waved her thanks and trotted on at the fat magazine man's side. Yes, I said fat. There was something about him that was annoyingly fat, possibly his intellect. In figure he was no more fat than I am, but some way his *avoirduois* flaunted itself flagrantly. He obstructed an otherwise pleasant landscape, and the worst of it was that he would not admit that he was fat. He thought he was just plump. You could tell by the way that he carried himself that he thought he was just

plump. Why don't fat people give up and admit it instead of lying to themselves and their friends?

I disliked Mr. Clair so thoroughly and heartily for a few minutes that I nearly forgot what I was standing in the lake for, but a numbness about the ankles where my feet should have been attached if there had been any feeling in them reminded me to stir around a bit unless I wished to become an angel mermaid, regardless of sex. I invented "angel mermaid" myself. As your own imagination will tell you, they are similar to hydro-aeroplanes, only safer. I gathered up my clams and went back to the house. With criminal caution I went in the back way so that no one would see what I had brought, and built a fire in the long unused stove.

Then I opened the clams. The clam is noted in literature for his silence. I wish to add that he is not only uncommunicative, but positively insultingly unsociable. He is a stay-at-home. I never met anyone so reluctant to come forth. In getting those bivalves to loosen up I ruined two hatchets, a can opener, a thumb

and an already frazzled temper. But they did come out finally. If the clam is doggedly persistent, put me down as persistently dogged.

I am no cook, but I knew that those clams would never do to be eaten in their natural state, especially after I had finished interviewing them, so I decided to give them the star part in a bouillon. The other ingredients were plain water and distilled water. There wasn't enough of the distilled water left, so I filled it up with the common or garden variety. A few microbes would undoubtedly make it more nourishing. Besides, I was anxious to pit something against those clams. Give them a fair deal and I'd back them against anything that inhabits the water, except a submarine.

Lucile came downstairs while I was in the kitchen, but she did not come out where I was. I heard her asking someone in the living-room, "Who left the telephone off the hook?"

There was a mumbled reply in the voice of Captain Perkins which I did not catch. Lucile apparently put the receiver back in its place because presently the telephone bell rang and she answered it.

"No," I heard her say, "Mr. Clair is not here." Then, after a pause, "No, Miss Dunmore isn't here either. Who shall I say called?—Oh, you don't wish them to be notified? Very well." There was a click as of the receiver being placed on the hook.

I came in from the kitchen. Lucile greeted me pleasantly enough when I asked her how she had enjoyed her nap.

"I don't think I've been asleep," she denied. "I just rested, that was all."

I did not tell her that I did not believe her. You have noticed yourself how a person who can sleep soundly through a thunderstorm or a piano-tuners' convention will tell how the slightest sound banishes their restless slumber.

"Your mother called up," I said briefly.

"Called up?" Lucile repeated. "How could she?"

No, she was not any more surprised than that.

"From Huntingdon's Island," I explained, and went on to tell what I knew of Mrs. Green's experience.

"She had no right to frighten me so," Lucile

exclaimed, with the righteous indignation of one whose sympathies have been wasted.

Also, Lucile selfishly disregarded my sufferings. Also those of Bopp. His emotions, I imagine, were chiefly confined to his digestive apparatus, but I suppose they must be classed as sufferings just the same.

I pointed out to Lucile that her mother had been through a tremendous adventure and had escaped only by a miracle.

"What possessed her to do such a thing?" Lucile was as petulant as a half-awakened child.

"I had a brother once who used to walk in his sleep. There was a zebra that—"

I interrupted Captain Perkins. "Your mother was scarcely responsible," I said.

"My brother was that way," chimed in the real estate captain. "You never could tell where you could find him nights. But the time that the zebra bit him was the curiosest, I allow."

"The zebra bit him?" Lucile's interest was aroused.

The captain settled himself to tell his favor-

ite tale, but did not get started because Vida breezed in with a rather shamefaced Clair in tow.

She came directly to me.

"I'll take that ring, please," she said.

"Do you really want it?"

"Certainly, I am entitled to wear it."

"Of course she ought to have your ring," urged Lucile. "That one will do until you can get her something else. May I congratulate you, Miss Dunmore?"

"Has Mr. Blainey told you about it?" Vida asked, naturally surprised that a third party should take an interest in a jesting wager.

"He didn't need to." Lucile smiled.

With Clair present I could hardly explain that Miss Dunmore had won my ring because she had made him propose to her. Thus I allowed myself to be misunderstood once more.

I retired as gracefully as possible to the kitchen, to be followed there shortly by Lipton S. Clair, who seemed to be in an agitated frame of mind.

"May I speak with you alone?" he demanded

cautiously, looking first right and then left like a stage villain.

"You will never see me more lonesome than in your company," I returned, stirring my clams.

"Have you ever been engaged?" He actually blushed as he said it.

"Why, yes," I was inclined to be reminiscent, "chronically. I've been engaged ever since I was about sixteen years of age. Do you care to listen to the history of my romances?"

"No, no," he reiterated, "not now, not now."

"All right, all right." I was not to be outdone in lavishness of language. "Say no more about it, say no more about it."

"What I want to ask," he began hastily, choked by emotion and one of my collars which was a quarter size too small for him, "what I want to ask is, how do you break off an engagement?"

"You have me there," I replied, putting more wood in the stove. "I never broke off an engagement in my life. Someone else always broke my engagements for me."

"You mean you were jilted?"

"That's a short, ugly word," I mused, tempted to put him in with the clams, "but 'twill pass, aye, it will serve.' "

"But I am afraid I won't be jilted," said Clair thoughtfully. "You see, I am a very desirable match."

"We thank you for the implied compliment," I bowed, and picked up a piece of cord-wood.

He went on obliviously. "I am a woman-hater. The ornamental sex has no place in the world of a man of genius. All my life I have escaped, and here on a bleak, inhospitable island where there are only two women I am trapped by one of them."

"I take it that you are engaged to Miss Dunmore," I hazarded.

"Practically," he retorted glumly. "She trapped me into a sort of a proposal. I didn't know what I was saying."

"And she accepted you?"

"Not yet," he replied, "but there is no hope; she will. I don't suppose she has met many men of culture among her associates, and I imagine I am a novelty to her."

"Man," I said admiringly, "you'd be a novelty to any girl."

"Thank you," said he absently. "But what can I do now?"

"Why," I explained innocently, "when you get on the mainland you get a marriage license and, unless you prefer a church wedding, I would suggest that you hunt up the justice of the peace and get it over with. I don't believe in long engagements myself." I was perfectly willing to tease this pedantic braggart. We owed him something for that fasting article anyway.

"But I don't want to marry anyone," he cried. "I must not sacrifice my career to romance and sentiment. I belong to the world. There must be a way out."

"If you don't want to marry Miss Dunmore, why did you arouse the spark of passion in her innocent breast?" I demanded.

"I don't know." He writhed in mental anguish. "I didn't dream that I was even being agreeable to her."

"Some women are more attracted by indifference than by attention," I comforted.

"Others are fascinated by downright brute violence."

"I suppose there must be some charm about me that I did not dream of," he mused modestly. "Don't you think she could forget me if she did not see me for a long while?"

"I'm afraid," I sighed, "that having once met you, no girl could ever forget you."

"Come, now," he said sharply, trying to detect a smile on my face; "it isn't as bad as that. If I could get away and write her a letter saying that I had been taken down with some illness and could not, as a dying man, hold her to her promise, that would solve the difficulty."

"Rather a nifty idea," I commented, "but, as a novelist, you must know that the heroine always flies to the bedside of the stricken hero and nurses him back to life. There is no use; Miss Dunmore would not allow you to die."

"No, I suppose not." He abandoned this scheme reluctantly. Another thought brightened him. "The getting away part of it is all right. If I did that I could get put in jail or something like that where she couldn't possibly

see me. While I was there I could write an article on prison reforms."

I heartily endorsed this scheme. The idea of seeing him in prison appealed to me personally. The colossal blindness of a conceited fat-head like that trying to get away from a charming, sweet, young girl like Vida, alienated him from human consideration.

He mused a moment. "I'll do it," he exclaimed. "If I don't show up, mum's the word."

"You can't get away," I reminded him. "There's no boat."

"I forgot to tell you that I am the champion swimmer of the Brooklyn Athletic Club. I think I saw some bathing suits hanging up in the shed. With one of those on it will be child's play to me."

Strangely cheered, he let himself out the back way and left me to the silence of my clams. I suppose I should have restrained him by force, but I had no idea that he really meant it

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MISS DUNMORE IS CONCERNED

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I LEFT the clams to their own devices for a while and went back to the living-room. Vida was there idly taking impressions from my seal ring on some soft kneaded rubber that lay on Lucile's desk. Lucile herself was not in sight. The captain and the best cook who ever ran a marine engine were sunk deep in the gloom which surrounds the non-reading man when cut off from his kind and his employment.

"Well," said Vida, when I stood over her, like an accusing judge, "what have I done now? Shouldn't I play with this rubber this way?"

"You know what you've done," I said sternly. "You trapped Lipton S. Clair into proposing to you."

"There's nothing wrong about that," Vida protested. "How do you suppose any man ever proposes? You have to trap them. Were you under the impression that adult males went around looking for a chance to pay

for someone else's board and millinery and hosiery and all that sort of thing? No, sir, the masculine mind is very wary. That's why we women have to be so much brighter than the men. It's a case of self-preservation."

"Anyway, you scared the wits out of Clair."

"What's the matter?"

"He's afraid you meant it. He's going to try to swim to the mainland in order to get away."

"What? Swim to the mainland?"

"Yes. He's a woman-hater, as you know, and he's afraid to face you."

"Good heavens! He must not do that." Vida was genuinely concerned. "What can I do to prevent it?"

"You might tell him that you are engaged to someone else. That might reassure him."

"I will." Vida got up determinedly and went to the door. It was dark outside and she turned back for directions. "Which way did he go?"

"Right down to the shore, I think," I said. "He seemed a trifle dazed, though, and might have wandered,"

"Funny thing," interjected Captain Perkins, "the way a feller will wander sometimes. My brother, he used to walk in his sleep. I was goin' to tell you where the zebra bit him that time."

"Yes," said Vida eagerly, "tell us where the zebra bit him."

"You'll have to hurry to catch him," I interrupted, "or it will be too late."

I literally pushed her out of the door and shut it after her.

The telephone bell rang.

"Hello," I answered it.

"Hello, this is Blaney. Is Clair there?"

"No, he's not here now."

"Then let me speak to Miss Dunmore, please."

"She isn't here either," I explained.

"Oh, they're out walking together again, I suppose," said my namesake sarcastically.

"No, not walking," I said; "swimming."

"What? At this time of night?" he yelled. "Not both of them? Vida can't swim."

"Maybe he is teaching her how," I suggested. I didn't know of any reason why I

should ease his mind anyway. A little jealousy would be good for him.

"Oh!" He took the blow like a man. Then I heard him say faintly, "Good bye," and I hung up the receiver.

Lucile confronted me when I turned around. "Do you know where Tootles is?"

I had forgotten about the pesky six-inch canine.

"No, I don't know where she is," I replied, with strict adherence to the truth. "Isn't she here?" I added guilelessly.

"No, and I'm dreadfully worried. There are so many strange people in the house that some one may have let her out, not knowing how careful we are with her."

"What would happen if she did get out?" I questioned, determined to know the depth of my crime.

"Why, lots of things. She might get lost and starved or get her feet wet and have pneumonia or a hawk might carry her off."

At this moment the unspeakable Bopp entered. He made a great show of weariness,

dragging his feet as if they were too heavy to lift.

"Have you seen her?" demanded Lucile.

"No," Bopp said wearily. "I've tramped all over the island again and again. There's no ravine, no gully, no bush that I haven't investigated. She must have left the island."

"She can't swim," moaned Lucile. "Her little legs are too short and her fur would get in her eyes."

"What?" Bopp yelled. "Fur get in her eyes? What are you talking about?"

"Tootles is lost," I threw in by way of explanation.

"Tootles?" said Bopp bewildered. "I've been looking for Mrs. Green."

"Oh, she's been found," Lucile explained.

"When?"

"Oh, hours and hours ago. She telephoned Mr. Blainey. She got in Mr. Kent's rowboat and was blown to a nearby island."

"You knew where Mrs. Green was in the middle of the afternoon," raged Bopp, turning on me, "and you didn't tell me, but let me

tramp my feet off looking for her? Here I am, dying of weariness and lack of sleep, when a word might have saved me."

While he was glaring at me Kent strolled in.

"Say, Mr. Bopp," Kent said curiously, "will you tell me one thing?"

"Why, certainly."

"How did you ever come to find that shelf on the cliff where you were sleeping all the afternoon? I passed you a dozen times, and I'd never have seen you at all if I hadn't heard you snore."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"OH, MY POOR TOOTLES!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

VIDA came in carrying a pair of shoes, a coat, a pair of trousers and a hat.

"He's gone," she said briefly. "As soon as he saw me coming he dived into the lake and swam off rapidly. He looked back from time to time, but I couldn't make him hear."

"He was afraid you would swim after him," I explained. "Are you in the market for old clothes?" I indicated her burden.

"No, these are his. He left them on the bank and I thought I might as well bring them in. I suppose he will be killed."

"Who?" asked Lucile and Bopp in one breath.

"Mr. Clair," Vida answered. "He is trying to reach the mainland by swimming."

"Oh, the brave fellow," Lucile exclaimed. "He is risking his life to get supplies to us. To think that I didn't like him very well at first."

I explained gently that if Mr. Clair ever reached the shore, which was very doubtful, he would probably never think of us again, or if he did it would be only to recall a very unpleasant experience which he would endeavor to banish from his mind.

"I wish I knew where Tootles is," worried Lucile.

"So do I," I added fervently. I don't suppose that anyone wished it any more sincerely than I did.

"She must be in the house," Vida said.

"I've looked everywhere," Lucile declared despondently.

"But she is such a little doggie," Vida insisted. "She might hide herself in a valise or an old box or she might even get inside the walls. Is there an unfinished part of the house in the attic where she might get in under the floor or between the inner and outer walls?"

"Why, yes, there's an attic," admitted Lucile, encouraged. "I went up there and whistled, but I never thought that she might get in under the floor. Come on, let's look."

We all mounted to the attic wherein reposed

the usual treasures of discarded and broken furniture, ancient magazines, trunks, and cobwebs, all bathed in a hot, dusty atmosphere reminiscent of mothballs.

"I'll whistle," Lucile said, "and then we'll be just as quiet as possible. If she's here she'll answer me."

"Answer you? Can she whistle, too?" asked Jim, the frying-pan engineer.

"No, of course not. When I whistle, if she's alive, she'll whine and bark."

"Oh."

"Shut up, Jim. Let her whistle," commanded Captain Perkins. "I never knew but one girl who could whistle good and after a dentist pulled one of her front teeth she couldn't any more."

"Sh," Vida said, laying a hand on the sea-dog's arm.

After a pause Jim asked, "Why don't she whistle?"

"She's tryin' to," explained the captain, who correctly interpreted the facial gymnastics which Lucile was performing.

"Maybe she ain't got enough steam in her

biler." Jim was earnestly endeavoring to be helpful.

"No, from the way she looks I think she's bust something," said his superior officer.

At last a faint hissing sound came from Lucile's puckered lips. No right-minded dog would ever have recognized it as a summons to heel, but I heaved a sigh of relief—I knew at last that Lucile was safe anyway.

After a pause Lucile asked, "Did you hear anything?"

"Not yet," Jim replied. "Why don't you try singing through a comb?"

"I meant, did you hear Tootles bark?"

"No, ma'm."

"Then she's dead." Lucile nearly broke down. She looked around for a bosom on which to weep, but scorned both Bopp's and mine. "I loved her so."

There was a whispered consultation between Captain Perkins and Jim, and Jim tiptoed downstairs.

"Maybe if you tried again," said the captain to Lucile, "the pup might hear you. You didn't whistle very loud the first time."

Lucile whistled again with a considerably more audible result.

We all listened.

There was a faint whine and a short, sharp, but distant, bark. I presume that I was the most surprised person in the party.

"There she is," Vida declared. "I thought maybe she was up here."

"But that doesn't sound like Tootles," Lucile objected.

"It must be." Bopp announced this masterpiece of logic. "There isn't any other dog in the house, is there? Probably her voice sounds different far off."

"And probably she is penned in somewhere and frightened. That might make her sound different." Ah, why did I have that idea, and why, having it, did I not conceal it in one of the recesses of my brain instead of voicing it to all?

"Oh, my poor Tootles!" Lucile began picturing her pet suffocating. "Maybe she is dying—or dead already."

"Whistle again," directed the captain.

Lucile made several ineffectual attempts, but

failed. "I can't," she declared; "I have to cry."

"Let me call her," I interposed. "She knows me."

As a boy I used to be able to make considerable racket by blowing on two fingers held at the proper angle in my mouth. I tried it with gratifying results. I must have been heard on the mainland.

The reply was immediate—short, snappy barks still a long way off, but very reassuring as to vigor and delight.

"She's right under us," Lucile cried.

"No, over by the window, I should say," argued Vida.

"Poor darling, she has forgotten how she got into the place and she thinks someone is keeping her cooped up on purpose. Please, Monty, keep on whistling. She *does* recognize you, and she'll know that help is coming. We must take up the floor."

In her excitement and time of need she had turned to me and not to Bopp! I didn't know how Tootles, whom I had last seen dashing up the beach amid a cloud of sand, could possibly

have managed to get under the attic floor, but Lucile had called me "Monty," and reason dismounted from her throne and carnival was king.

I whistled blithely, piercingly, joyfully, coaxingly, and whenever I paused the barking rewarded me.

"Tear up the floor," Lucile ordered. "We can't let her stay there any longer."

"Hadn't we better see if she won't come out by herself?" the captain asked tentatively. "It seems a shame to tear up that there plank-ing."

"Not for Tootles," Lucile replied. "What do I care for an old attic floor when my Tootles is in danger? She shan't stay there another minute if I can help it." She tried to pry up a board with her finger nails.

"Wait," I requested. "Let me do this scientifically."

I wrenched a leg from an old armchair which had already suffered the amputation of one of its extremities, and with that as a lever pried up one of the flooring boards at the ends which extended loose over the floor beams. As

the plank came up amid a cloud of dust Lucile gave me a look such as must have rewarded Launcelot from the grandstand after he ran a curtain pole through a cast-iron white hope.

We assembled around the hole I had made. No Tootles in sight.

"Whistle," Lucile commanded me.

I obeyed.

Joyful barks, but nothing more.

"Take up some more boards," Lucile might have been saying; "Wait until you see the whites of their eyes," or "Don't give up the ship."

"Hadn't we better wait?" Captain Perkins was an earnest advocate of the Fabian policy.

"No."

I took up another board, and yet another, stopping to whistle each time without apparently getting any nearer.

"She's there somewhere," declared Tootles' foster mother, puzzled but still determined. "Keep on until you find her."

I had taken up all but half a dozen of the boards when my foot slipped from the cross

floor beam on which I was working and struck the lath which was nailed on the other side.

The lath offered but slight resistance, the plaster was even more fragile, and I went through rather hastily, clutching wildly at nothing in particular. My last recollection was of Lucile's horror-stricken face as she saw me sinking from sight, like the villain in "Lorna Doone."

My next conscious remembrance was of sitting flat in the middle of a bed, the springs of which were gently bouncing me up and down after the fashion of a net into which a trapeze performer has dropped from the top of the tent. Above was a hole in the ceiling, around me were chunks of plaster and splinters of lath and sitting in a chair by the window was Jim, his mouth open, emitting a series of short sharp yelps.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
FURTHER MYSTERY

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LUCILE, Vida, Bopp, Kent, and the captain made a ring of faces around the hole in the ceiling.

"Stop barking, you darn fool," shouted the captain, after a moment devoted to startled surprise by all concerned.

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Jim, saluting.

"Then it wasn't Tootles at all." Lucile was overwhelmed by grief that was all the more poignant because it had been held off so long by hope.

"You have to admit that Jim is an all round bright young fellow," declared the captain proudly. "It ain't often you can find a marine engineer who can cook and do as good an imitation of a dog as that."

"But why," I fixed the captain with a malevolent eye, "why did he imitate a dog at this particular moment? What is the cause of this character study of a canine under a floor?"

Why not a dog out in the yard chasing his tail, or a Newfoundland pup having an argument with a dilapidated shoe?"

"Why, this was a little idea of my own," stated Captain Perkins, modestly. "When I see Miss Green was going to be all broke up if nothing answered when she whistled, I told Jim there to go downstairs and pretend to be the pup, just so's she'd feel better."

"What I want to know, Mr. Blainey," Jim asked, with a brightly enquiring eye, "is how did you know just where that bed was?"

"Are you hurt?" Lucile enquired, with tardy solicitude. "I'll come right down and get the liniment."

"These modern steel springs are marvels of strength, aren't they?" speculated Bopp, when they had all descended and formed an admiring circle around the bed. "Think of dropping Monty on one of those old-fashioned coil spring affairs."

Lucile entered with a strip of inch gauze and a bottle of peroxide.

"This is all I could find," she explained. "Mr. Johnson borrowed the liniment last week

to use on his horse. Where shall I put this?"

"Rub a little of it right here," Bopp pointed to one of the legs of the bed.

"I never can thank you enough, Monty," declared Lucile, disregarding Bopp and smiling at me tenderly. "You did your best, and even if we never find Tootles I shall not forget what you have gone through for her."

"Neither will your father." Bopp indicated the ceiling.

"I know where I saw that dog last," exclaimed Kent, as one inspired.

"Where?" Lucile turned to him.

"He was out doors hittin' the breeze this afternoon."

"Outdoors? She isn't allowed out. What was she doing?"

"She was vamping up the beach and Mr. Blainey was running after her."

Guilt seeks out the criminal and fastens her brand upon him publicly. Policemen are but jailers. Detectives are only men who let nature do their work for them.

There was a nasty staccato laugh. I did not need to look to know that it was Bopp.

"Mr. Kent seems to have a very observing mind," he said.

Lucile looked at me reproachfully. "Is this true?" she asked.

"Yes." George Washington could have done no more.

"You didn't catch her?"

"No."

Nothing more was to be said. I had been tried, convicted and sentenced.

The telephone rang. Lucile went to answer it. The rest of us followed more at our leisure. When we had arrived downstairs, Lucile was talking to someone over the wire, evidently her mother.

"I'm glad you're all right," she was saying, "and that you have had something to eat. Don't feel badly about breaking the fast. No one blames you a bit. That's all right. We would too if we could."

A pause during which she listened, a frown gathering on her face.

"Don't you worry, mother. We're all right. All except Tootles. She is lost.— What's the matter? You saw someone outside in the

moonlight?— A man? With whiskers?— Nonsense, no one lives there at this time of year. Everybody left in September. Just go to bed and don't think about such things."

Lucile stifled a scream.

"Hello, mother. What? Someone is trying the door? It's opening—hello—hello—mother—"

Lucile dropped the receiver and sank backwards into Vida's arms. I picked up the telephone and held it to my ear shouting "Hello! Hello!"

There was no response. The wire was dead.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
THE SECRET OF THE SOUP

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHEN Lucile had been revived without resorting to any of the violent methods suggested by the resourceful Captain Perkins, I endeavored to explain away any cause for fright.

"Even if she really did see a man," I said, "which seems improbable, he is not going to murder her. Probably he just stopped to enquire the time of day."

"But mother said he had whiskers."

"I know," I continued, "that is against him, but maybe it is hereditary in his family."

"Maybe she just dreamed it," Kent offered sensibly. "Let's call her up again. She seemed a little dented on top when I first saw her. By this time maybe the attack is over."

That seemed a fair enough suggestion and I acted on it. I asked Central to give me Huntingdon's Island once more.

"I'm sorry," Central answered, "but I can't seem to get them. I've been ringing on that

line for the last ten minutes. There's another party trying to get them."

"Another party?" I questioned. "Who?"

"I couldn't say. It isn't anyone I know. His voice sounds like he was a tall, thin, young man from New York."

"Can't get them," I told the listening group.

"What can we do now? I must go to help mother. I must go. I must go." Lucile began to get hysterical.

"Wait, dear," Vida said, patting her hand. "We can't go because we haven't any boat." Turning to the rest of us she asked, "Whom could we telephone to and ask to go over there?"

"The sheriff is the right man, I should think," Bopp suggested.

"He'd be plumb tickled, too," added Captain Perkins. "He ain't had a chance to arrest nobody since he's been sworn in."

"That's it, the sheriff," Lucile said feverishly. "Get the sheriff and let me talk to him."

"We don't want the public to know about this," I objected.

"What do I care about the public if my

mother is in danger?" Lucile very properly demanded.

There seemed to be nothing else to do, so I asked the telephone operator to see if she could locate the sheriff.

"I guess he's down to the railroad station," Central volunteered. "It's most train time, and he most usually goes down there looking for a suspicious character to get off the north-bound passenger. I'll ask the agent if he's there."

She did, and he was. After a slight delay I found myself addressing a strange voice which I requested to hold the wire. I turned the receiver over to Lucile.

She told the sheriff in breathless haste that her mother had been foully dealt with on Huntingdon's Island and offered him limitless rewards to capture her slayer. I don't believe that Lucile herself really thought the situation was as serious as she painted it, but she was a victim of the well-known human vice of exaggeration to which women especially are addicted when relating some calamity.

When she had told him details which I am

sure even the Haniman Syndicate reporter would never have thought of without her assistance, she at last reluctantly hung up.

"Is there anything further we can do?" Lucile paced up and down the room, stopping to look out the window from time to time as if she expected to be able to see to Huntingdon's Island.

"Nothing but wait, dear," Vida said. "I'm sure nothing serious has happened."

"Then why doesn't mother call up and tell us that she is all right?"

This was unanswerable. No one thought of a sensible reason for keeping Mrs. Green away from the telephone.

"We had better do something to occupy our minds until we hear from the sheriff," Vida said, rising to the position of commanding officer in the emergency.

I thought of my clams.

"Come with me," I exclaimed, and led the way toward the kitchen. "I have a surprise for you."

"You have found Tootles!" Lucile was

radiant. That girl's mind oscillated like a pendulum between her lost mother and her lost dog.

"No," I replied, somewhat crestfallen, for I had again forgotten Tootles, "but I have something for you to eat."

Never have I been so popular as I was at that moment, that is, with all but Lucile. I haven't said much about our hunger because there is little to be said. It is practically impossible to convey to the mind of the well-fed reader what it means to miss many meals. There is nothing in the average run of experience with which to compare it. The sensations of a drunkard taking an enforced cure may be somewhat similar, but I doubt if even that is as strenuous. We had now been without food three days and had missed nine meals. One interesting sidelight of our experience is the discovery that men seem to depend more on food than women do. A male is an individual to avoid when minus one or two meals. Don't speak to him at all unless you absolutely must and then it is better to write your com-

munication and shove it under the door.

I led my hopeful companions to the kitchen.

"What is it?" Bopp asked.

"It's a secret," I replied mysteriously, investigating my kettle of clams, which, strange to relate, had not boiled entirely away. "I'll serve it to you and then you can guess what it is."

I found a number of bowls in the pantry and with a porcelain dipper I ladled a goodly portion of clam broth into each. When I had passed them around my companions stood sniffing their rations suspiciously.

"Did you cook this all by yourself?" asked Kent.

"I did," I averred modestly.

"From raw materials you found on the island?" supplemented Bopp.

"Everything in it grew right here," I explained.

"It's Tootles," screamed Lucile, turning pale and putting her bowl down on the table.

"It can't be," said Bopp, sniffing. "This has a decidedly fishy smell."

"I know it," wailed Lucile with tears cours-

ing down her cheeks. "That's what makes me think it's Tootles—we have been feeding her lots of fish lately."

I started to explain. "Lucile, how can you accuse me of such a thing?"

"You never liked Tootles. I know it. You cared more for your appetite than for my little darling. Now I see through all the mystery about what the food was, and what you were doing all the afternoon while I slept. I suppose you drugged me so that I wouldn't hear the poor little thing's screams. Oh, mother! Oh, Tootles!"

"Lucile," I began, "I—"

"Don't speak to me. I don't ever want to see you again, you fat murderer."

That was too much. I might have stood for being called a murderer, but not a fat one.

"Very well," I replied. "It certainly will not be necessary for you to see me. I will go, and I assure you that I will never enter your house again."

I went to the door with as much dignity as I could assume.

"Good bye," I said as I opened the door.

No one answered but Bopp, who tiptoed after me and whispered solemnly, "We are going to bury your soup tomorrow morning with full military honors. If you can't come, send flowers. The service will be held at ten-thirty."

I went out and slammed the door in his face. It was raining again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE SUMMER HOUSE CAPTIVE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

To my shame be it said that my thoughts dwelt with that untasted clam stew as I left the house. I had quarreled with her whom I loved best, but even that paled into insignificance compared with the fact that I craved food. Thus does physiology triumph over psychology every time.

While the rain drizzled down on my unprotected head and the chill night wind blew through my intentionally porous outing clothing, I admitted to myself that perhaps I had been a trifle precipitate in asserting my pride without first providing myself with an overcoat and an umbrella. It is one thing to leave a friend's house in the city vowing never to return, and quite a different proposition to do the same on an island where there are no other dwellings. Standing in the rain with an empty stomach, I find, is an excellent cure for

haughtiness of spirit. Prominent members of the Bread Line can doubtless corroborate this.

There was no particular place to go and apparently no chance of leaving the island before morning, anyway. I bethought me of the lattice summer house and decided that it might not be a bad idea to take what shelter it afforded. Before I started out, however, I went out to a shed in the rear of the house which by courtesy is called the "garage," to see what I might find to protect me from the weather. The chief contents of the place as revealed by a flickering match were step-ladders, cans of paint, coiled up garden hose, kerosene cans and empty wash tubs. None of these, even the last named, were particularly serviceable unless one happened to be built like Diogenes, whose figure, to my mind, has always been a subject for speculation.

On a line stretched across the shed dangled a small collection of dainty clothing of an intimate nature which I discovered to be the costume worn by Miss Dunmore when she came ashore and which had been hung there to dry out. The tights and doublet were almost dry,

but practically useless to me because Vida and I have not the same waist measure by a couple of feet. I abandoned any idea of staying in the shed on account of its proximity to the cottage and headed for the summer house. The wind, I noticed, was not nearly as strong as it had been during the day and was hauling around to the southward, which gave me hopes of a calm day on the morrow. A calm day meant food and a chance to leave the island.

After some difficulty I found the summer house and sat under its cheerless shelter listening to the rain drip off from its roof on to the dead leaves below while I reviewed my situation. I had to admit that I could not be in a much worse plight. Lucile had doubtless spoken hastily and with a sharpness engendered by knife-edge nerves; still she was proud and would probably not apologize to me any more than I would retract my spoken vow not to enter her house again. We might meet at the homes of friends or even in restaurants, but doubtless she would be careful to avoid chance encounters. Clearly my love affair was in a bad way and required heroic treat-

ment to put it back into a healthy normal condition.

Meditating upon that and wondering what could have happened to Mrs. Green on the little island just south of us I gradually dozed off and slipped down to the floor. It is surprising under what strange conditions a man can sleep if he really needs it. They say Napoleon was able to snatch a nap on the battlefield with an artillery duel going on.

My figure is not such, however, that I rest perfectly on a flat surface. For that reason my slumbers were uneasy and troubled with dreams in which I went through various tortures of the Inquisition, such as having my bones broken on the rack and other mediæval variations of the third degree. My last nightmare was that of being blinded by a red-hot iron. (Who was it had that done to him? I remember, it was "Michael Strogoff, the Courier of the Czar." Shades of Jules Verne!) Anyway, it happened to me in my dreams and the burning sensation was so vivid that I awoke in terror.

Tootles was calmly licking my face. I sup-

pose her tongue had rasped across my eyes. I remembered having been told that this method of awakening a sleeper was one of her cutest tricks. If I ever have a dog of my own I'm going to spend a lot of time teaching him not to do this trick.

My first and most natural impulse was to kick the little pest about two-thirds of the way to the mainland, but I was governed by a later and more humane course of reasoning. Tootles had already caused me too much trouble for me to care about losing sight of her again. In the future Damon and Pythias would have nothing on Tootles and me as far as intimacy went.

I was about to insist that the pup rest somewhere besides on my head and return to my slumbers once more, when my attention was attracted by a slight noise outside. Someone was cautiously approaching the summer house. Who the dickens could be out wandering about at that time of night? I judged by the feel that it was about midnight. You know how you can feel lateness. It is harder to do in the country than in the city where you have the sense of

hearing to help you, but you can tell just the same even in the woods. I think maybe there is a difference in the quality of the air after the sun has not magnetized it for a long time.

The person, whoever he was, came nearer, a little at a time. Finally he touched the side of the house and felt his way around to the door.

The latch was lifted and some one entered and paused a moment as if in doubt where to stop.

I silenced an impulse on the part of Tootles to welcome the intruder.

The weight of the man who was there not ten feet from me made the floor boards sag as he walked about. He was coming towards me.

Apparently he struck one of the benches with which the place was furnished, for it scraped along the floor. For a moment he paused uncertainly and then lit a match.

In its light I discovered that he was a tall, nattily clad young man whom I had never seen before.

I imagine my surprise was infinitesimal com-

pared to his. I was expecting him, but he could not, by any possible chance, have been prepared for a wide-awake, unblinking stranger staring at him six feet away. For an instant, only an instant, I saw a flicker of fear in his eyes, then, disregarding me, he held the match to a cigar stub already between his teeth and drew a long, deep puff.

When we were once more in darkness save for the tip of his cigar, he said pleasantly, "Good evening."

I waited. I knew that the superstitious savage man way down in his heart was telling him that there would not be any answer.

At last I said with equal pleasantness, "Good evening."

He sighed with relief.

"Is this Green's cottage?" he enquired.

"No," I replied, "this is merely a shelter overlooking an especially fine view of the lake. You will enjoy it in the morning."

"Oh. Unfortunately I shall not be here. You, I presume, are taking care of things for Mr. Green."

"Why, yes," I returned, perfectly willing

that he should take me for a night watchman until I discovered what he wanted and how he got there.

"I was going to Mr. Green's cottage, but since I have met you it will save me the trouble."

"I imagine it will," I answered grimly.

"Now wait a minute," he retorted, correctly interpreting my manner. "Don't you jump at conclusions. I haven't much time or I could explain it all perfectly. I'm not a thief, I'm a newspaper man on the trail of a big story, and there are a few questions I want to ask and a couple of photographs I want to borrow. I know it looks funny for me to be prowling around at this time of night, but there's an old grouch over at Green's who wouldn't answer my questions over the telephone, so I simply had to get a boat to bring me over to find out for myself. Savvy?"

"Umph," I pretended to weigh his case judicially. "So you were going to break into Mr. Green's cottage to ask a few questions. Well, I guess I can answer any questions you

want to ask until the sheriff takes you in charge."

He laughed.

"Honest to goodness, man," the reporter exclaimed, "you take yourself seriously, don't you? If you help me I'm willing to cough up a couple of dollars in real money, which is more than my editor will be apt to stand for in my expense account, but if you don't, I'll find out anyway, because it's a way I have, and you'll probably be discharged for not catching me."

"But it seems to me that I have caught you," I interposed mildly.

"Hardly," he retorted. "From the glance I got at your figure when I lit the match I should judge that you could run a hundred yards in ten flat—minutes, that is, while I am some sprinter, as you will have to admit if you watch me during the next few seconds. I am off."

But he wasn't. While he was talking I had taken the precaution of moving around between him and the door, so that when he started to leave, I tripped him neatly and sat

on his chest. This is a very effective type of jiu jitsu for a heavy set man to employ.

However, I couldn't sit on him all night. For one thing I wanted to sleep. It wouldn't do to let him get away, either. Finally an ingenious scheme solved my difficulty. I removed his coat without unbuttoning it, which is done by grasping firmly the two tails in the back, one in each hand, and pulling sidewise. Treated in this fashion, even the most expensively made garment will separate along the back seam and may then be taken off from the front. After I had the coat in my possession I tore it into strips, which I tied together and made a rope with which I bound his ankles and wrists. Just for good measure I ran a line around his body to hold his arms down.

When I had him all done I lit a match to make sure it was a good job.

"You'll be sorry for this," he growled. "Do you know that Mrs. Green has been abducted to Huntingdon's Island and murdered by lake pirates?"

I grunted.

"Won't you let me go? I will save her.

Remember if you don't I know what you look like and I'll put you in jail for assault."

"It isn't customary," I commented, "for men who break into other people's houses to have anyone put in jail."

"There's a place on my shoulder that itches," he complained. "Will you please scratch it?"

"I would, if you hadn't made that remark about my running a hundred yards in ten minutes. As it is, I think I'll let your shoulder itch. It will take your mind off what the managing editor of your paper will say when you don't show up with that story. So long."

I went out.

"Help!" A cry of real terror came from within the summer house.

I turned back.

"What is it?" I asked.

"There's something alive here," he chattered. "I think it's a snake. It's crawling across my face."

For a moment I thought of letting him think that, then I decided that it would be too cruel.

I lit a match.

"There's your snake," I commented briefly,

indicating Tootles, who was licking his face industriously.

"Oh." He sighed with unmistakable relief. "Take it away, will you?"

"Couldn't think of it, old man. That dog has been trained for months to do that very thing. If I made her stop now, all those months of training would be confused in her little dog mind. She won't hurt you."

"I can't stand this." He apparently tried to roll away from Tootles. "If you are going away please take this pup with you."

"Impossible." I went to the door again. "She will guard you. Tootles," I commanded sternly as if she had been a regular dog. "Sic 'em, Tootles—I mean lick him, Tootles, lick him."

I went out, followed by a variously expressed opinion of myself and Tootles. Lucile, I presume, would not have allowed Tootles to hear such language, but I think it was a liberal education for the dog, and I believe that she has been the better for it ever since.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

VOYAGE OF THE *MERRY WIDOW*

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

It had stopped raining entirely now and the south wind had become a warm and welcome reality. The stars were out in considerable force, veiled now and then by scurrying banks of storm clouds which were being driven in full retreat to the horizon.

I went down to the cove. As I had rather expected I found Bill Johnson there with his motor-scow, the *Merry Widow*, with her nose driven up on the beach.

"Morning, Bill."

"Goot morning, sare."

Bill's father was Danish, I believe, and his mother was a French Canadian. His speech is a combination of patois that he heard at home. He's an oldish sort of a man now, with bent back and twisted fingers, but he is still the best guesser as to what might be the matter with a motor boat that it has been my pleasure to

meet. He has to be to keep his own boat afloat.

"Quite a sea out there." I indicated the lake.,

"She shall run pretty high," replied Bill, "but not so high like she do a while ago."

"Just come out for the ride?" I queried.

"No—the *Merry Widow* she bring over a young man, a newspaper feller. He say he shall give three dollar or I wouldn't, by Yimminy Christmas, do it. No, sare, not for two-fifty even I shan't do it." Then he added with a slight wink, "The sea, she ain't so high now as I make him think."

"Do you know where Huntingdon's Island is?" I enquired, a vague plan of action formulating itself in my brain.

"Sure, I know him. She set over yon 'bout three mile, maybe four or two and a half."

"Well, the young man you brought over here has decided to stay for an hour or so. While you are waiting I want you to take me over to Huntingdon's and get Mrs. Green."

"Missus Green? What she do by Huntingdon's?"

"I'll tell you later after I think up some interesting explanation. At present I shouldn't be able to do the subject justice. How about it? Will you take me over there?"

He hesitated.

"Here's a dollar," I said. "The storm is quieting down a good deal and, anyway, you know the *Merry Widow* is the best sea-boat on the lake."

The flattery won him. What owner, even of the veriest motor monstrosity, is not susceptible to praise bestowed upon his darling. I have found, too, that when no word can be said for the excellence of the engine, or the beauty of line of the vessel, a knowing remark dropped about her sea-going qualities will always hit the spot. The worse they look the more seaworthy they are, at least to the distorted imagination of the deluded individuals who own them.

Bill took the dollar.

"I guess she shall run all right. One walve, she shan't work yust so good as she ought, but I got some wire. I fix him up."

I have since discovered that almost any re-

pair can be made on the *Merry Widow* with a piece of bell wire, from a burst water jacket to a defective induction coil.

I helped him shove off and Bill tinkered with the one cylinder machine gun which propelled the barge, until he induced it to bark at irregular intervals.

Have I forgotten to mention that the *Merry Widow* is an open boat with no superstructure or canopy of any sort? If I have, let me state here that her lines are very décolleté and a large wave meets with little obstruction save the passengers when it starts to travel from the bow to the stern.

"She shall be, by Yimminy Christmas, dam' choppy," Bill commented. "The wind she shall haul to the south and make cross waves."

He was absolutely correct. As soon as we left the mouth of the cove we went through some evolutions which I would have said it was absolutely impossible for a man of my build to perform. I was favorably considering the idea of being sea-sick when a larger wave than usual washed over and struck the engine. It expired peacefully on the spot.

"What has happened?" I asked, with a landsman's justified terror.

"The engine has stopped." Bill's calm statement of the obvious exasperated me.

"Of course it has stopped. Can we ever start it again?"

"Sure. She shall run some more. The wave, she short circuit the spark. See," Bill pointed, "she all wet." His enthusiasm as a lecturer on the gasoline engine made him forget the lake outside.

It was brought to his attention by a large wave which tipped us on our beam ends and dropped Bill and myself in an affectionate group into the stern of the boat, where we were joined presently by a collection of oil cans, wrenches, grease cans, and other marine impedimenta.

Bill removed his elbow from the pit of my long since hopeless stomach and scrambled to the engine.

"She ain't hurted a bit," he announced. "Lend me your handkerchief."

I silently passed him the article he desired. He carefully wiped off a large part of the en-

gine with it before he offered it back to me. I declined and told him to consider it my contribution to the equipment of the boat.

"Now, sare," he directed, "you must hold the coat over the spark so she shall not get, by Yee Vizz, again wet."

He showed me how to protect the engine from the elements by interposing my coat and my shivering body between it and the waves. This being accomplished he started the machinery and we lurched forth into the night once more.

From time to time I caught a tubful of lake on my back and it would slowly trickle down through my clothing to my shoes. I had time between waves that came over to get one sizable batch of water partly warmed up before another struck me. I must have taken the chill off several hundred barrels of water on that trip.

There was one consolation. I was too busy and uncomfortable in other ways to be seasick. Standing in a strained position, my feet braced against the lee scuppers or the balloon

jib or something nautical like that, my back bent and my arms holding my coat over a crippled threshing-machine disguised as a marine engine, I had no attention to spare for any merely internal disturbance.

Bill split his time between steering and mending the engine, keeping up a running fire of conversation, not with me but with the motor. When she'd cough weakly, Bill would hit her in some apparently tender spot with the flat of a monkey wrench and say, "Come on, *Merry*, you shan't stop. I knock the carbon off your valves—now you feel better."

Then the engine would pick up and run quite smoothly for a hundred explosions or so, before she'd go wrong in another place. Bill's chief claim to distinction as a gasoline engineer lies in the fact that no matter what went wrong he did not let that engine entirely cease its activities until we reached the dock at Huntingdon's Island.

After I had filled my lungs with a little undiluted air, I picked up a heavy wrench to use as a weapon and, directing Bill to arm himself

likewise and follow as quietly as possible, I set out up the path leading from the dock, which doubtless ended at the Huntingdon domicile.

The moon was up now, and though occasionally darkened for a moment by flying clouds there was sufficient light for us to proceed rapidly.

A turn of the path brought us in range with an illuminated window. Either someone was in the house of which the window was a part or had only very recently left it. I laid my hand on Bill Johnson's arm, counselling caution, and led the way off from the path and through the shrubbery to a position near the house, but a little to one side of the window.

Clearly it was up to me to look in and see what was in that room. A dread of what I might see, not unmingled with a little wholesome fear for my personal safety, took possession of my heart. Suppose someone were waiting inside to shoot at the first head which appeared in the light. However, I had come a long way to find out what had happened in that house and I forced myself to be courageous. I crept to the lower corner of the window and quickly

raised my head so as to bring the interior of the room within range of one eye.

There was no one, nothing human or that had been human, in sight in that part of the room which I could see. The lamp, sitting peacefully on a deal table shed its mellow rays on surroundings and furniture which proclaimed the room to be the kitchen.

I crept back to Bill.

"No one in sight," I reported. "There is someone in there I want to surprise, to play a joke on, so I am going to break in the door."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Bill boisterously, before I could check him. "She shall be dam' funny yoke. I been comical cuss myself."

My explanation would have sounded a trifle thin to anyone but Bill, and even to this day I have misgivings about my ethical right to lead a trusting stranger, even a motor-boat repair man, into what might have been serious danger without warning him first. However, I didn't think of that then.

We felt our way to the door, which was a solid one of plain wood with no glass panels.

"Could you knock that off from its hinges?" I whispered.

"I bet," Bill replied. "Easy."

"All right then. Get ready. One—two—three!"

Crash! Bill sprang at the door and it fell inward, letting him sprawl half way across the room.

I stepped across the threshold and levelled my monkey wrench like a revolver.

"Throw up your hands," I commanded.

To my surprise I found that I was addressing a whiskered individual, clad in white swimming tights only, who was backed up against a door in a far corner of the room. He threw up one hand, keeping the other one behind him.

"Up with the other hand," I shouted, advancing into the room to get a better view of its occupant but keeping sufficiently in the shade of the lamp so that the real nature of my weapon would not be immediately evident. "Throw up your other hand!"

"I can't," said my prisoner stubbornly.

"Can't?" I repeated in surprise. "Why can't you?"

"Because I've got my thumb over the key-hole and there is a woman on the other side trying to peek through!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A DISAPPOINTED SHERIFF.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SOMETHING about the quality of that voice seemed familiar. I grabbed the lamp from the table and held it so the full light fell on his face.

"Lipton S. Clair," I exclaimed. "You here!"

"I admit that I did not expect to be recognized in this island wilderness," he began pompously, careful to gesticulate, however, only with his free hand, "but why should I not be here as well as anywhere else?"

"Because when I saw you last you were going to swim to the mainland."

"Who are you?" he demanded in turn, trying to see past the light which I held in front of me.

"Montmorency Blainey," I replied.

"Yes, yes, I understand." Then suddenly he shrank more closely into the doorway. "Is

that woman—my fiancée—Miss Dunmore—with you?”

I reassured him and asked him how he came to be where I had found him.

“I found the swimming a trifle more strenuous than I had expected,” he began, “and I must have been carried off my course by storm currents. Anyway, I discovered that it was practically impossible for me either to reach the mainland or to get back to Green’s Island. The general trend of the waves was in this direction and I was forced to go along, saving my strength for keeping my head above water.

“The rest of my story is absurdly simple. I saw land here and came ashore. It was not quite dark and I came up the path to the house without noticing the light in the window. I had no thought of there being any inhabitants and my intention was to rummage around until I found something to eat and some dry clothes.

“As soon as I opened the door I saw that I had committed a social blunder. There was a woman standing at the telephone and when she saw me she screamed and ran through this door, slamming and locking it after her. It

was useless to try to explain to a frightened female the innocuous nature of my visit, so I refrained. I was about to partake of some of the food I found on the table there when I heard the key being carefully withdrawn from the lock on the other side. Quick as a flash I asked myself the question, 'Why do people withdraw the keys from locked doors?' The answer struck me instantly. 'So that they may look through the keyholes, of course.' I recollected my costume. With one bound I jumped to the door and put my thumb over the keyhole, where it has been ever since."

"The little boy who saved the dikes in Holland has nothing on you." I saw that he expected praise, so I gave it to him. "But if you have been here surely you have heard the telephone bell ringing."

"Yes, it has been making an infernal racket ever since I arrived, but how could I leave my post to answer it?" He helplessly waved his free hand in the direction of the keyhole.

"Ouch! Stop!" he yelled, jerking his thumb away and dancing up and down frantically.

"What has happened?"

"She jabbed a pin into my thumb. I'm bleeding to death. Put your thumb over the keyhole a minute while I swear."

I was about to do that, foolish as it was, when there was the sound of a rifle shot somewhere outside and almost simultaneously the lamp which I held fell apart in my hand and crashed to the floor.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Bill Johnson in the darkness. "I see the yoke now."

"What happened?" Clair asked.

"Some one shot out the light."

"What for?"

"I can't imagine. I assure you that I wasn't expecting it any more than you were. If I had been I would have allowed you to hold the lamp."

Any further conversation was cut short by a scattering fusillade of shots, some of which came through the window, as we could tell by the tinkle of glass.

"This is a regular attack." Clair may have been an egotistical ass, but I must give him credit for not showing fear under fire. "What shall we do?"

"As we have no weapon with which to fight back I suppose we had better surrender. Let's display a flag of truce."

"All right. Use your handkerchief."

I reached in my pocket. Then I remembered that I had donated my handkerchief to Bill for wiping off the engine. I explained briefly to Clair.

Bill likewise proved guileless of a mouchoir.

"Anything white will do," Clair suggested.

"Then tear off a piece of your bathing suit."

"No," he protested, amid a further rattle of musketry. "I can't spare any."

Fortunately any further discussion proved unnecessary. Our assailants apparently discovered that we were not putting up a very formidable resistance, for the fusillade ceased and a moment later a voice at the door exclaimed, "Resistance is useless. Every corner of the room is covered. John, show a light."

A bull's eye flashed into the room and revealed us blinking in its glare.

"Do you surrender?"

"I do," I promised, as solemnly as if I were going through the marriage ceremony.

"Humph! Desperate characters!" declared the voice in the doorway. "Light up a few lamps."

Several men entered and lit two kerosene lamps which they found in a cupboard and a lantern which seemed to belong to their party.

In the illumination thus afforded I could make out at least a dozen men of the type which is indigenous to the bench in front of the small town grocery store. Just now, however, they were doing an imitation of the vigilance committee in the Third Act of "The Virginian." One carried a coil of half-inch rope and all were armed with weapons which ranged from shotguns to horse pistols. One, a little better dressed than the rest, carried a camera, which he proceeded to set up in one corner of the room.

"Ye're arrested," announced the original speaker, a rather heavy set man with gray moustaches of the trailing arbutus type. "I'm the sheriff."

He displayed a brilliant new star pinned to a suspender bordering a shirt front, which was slightly discolored by tobacco, betraying

rather imperfect marksmanship on the part of the wearer.

"Arrested?" Clair demanded. "What for?"

"Fer wilful murder." The sheriff shivered slightly as he spoke. "Ain't that so, boys?"

A growl from the warlike posse answered him.

"Lynch 'em," yelled the man who carried the rope, apparently fearful lest he had brought his burden in vain.

"Aye, that's it. String 'em up." These and other enthusiastic cries reassured him.

"Now wait a minute, boys." The sheriff turned a cold eye on his enthusiastic retinue and spat with a fair degree of accuracy at the kitchen stove. "While, as a private individool, I have to admit, boys, that I would enjoy a lynchin' as much as any of you, still I have to remember that I have a duty to perform, a sacred trust, namely, to wit, to uphold the majesty of the law in Maskeloon County."

A murmur of applause among his henchmen made it evident that they were used to oratory from their chief.

"But we've never had a lynching in this

county," protested the bloodthirsty man with the rope, "and they've had two over Lake County way."

Local pride nearly swayed the sheriff against us, but at last he held up his hand.

"I can't allow it, boys," he said regretfully. "All we can do, accordin' to the law, is to take 'em to jail."

"Before I move out of this place," Lipton S. Clair protested, "I've got to have some clothes."

"All right, son," soothed the sheriff, "there ain't any call to get hectic about it. Si," turning to one of the others, "see if there ain't some old clothes in that closet in the hired help's room."

Si departed and soon returned with a garment known in history as a "Mother Hubbard," so called because of its resemblance to a squash.

"This is all I could find," Si reported. "The Huntingdons' help was a female woman."

"That'll do," the sheriff said briefly, tossing it to Clair. "Put this on without any arguments and we'll be on our way."

Clair thought of protesting, but was overcome by the idea of the woman in the next room

and hastily 'donned the garment, which was cut on lines designed to cover any sort of figure which nature could turn out. The effect of the dress plus the whiskers was startling, to say the least.

"Before we go," the sheriff decided, "we had best have a look at the remains." To me he said, "Where is the deceased? Where is Mrs. Green?"

"Mrs. Green hasn't been murdered," I started to set him straight.

"I didn't ask how she met her death," the sheriff thundered. "Of course I don't expect you to admit you killed her. All I asked was where she is, and, by George, I'll have an answer. Where is she?"

I pointed silently at the locked door.

"Boys," said the sheriff with emotion, "a poor defenceless woman lies beyond that door foully done to death by these here ruffians. Smith, Wadsworth, Clancy, Snider, you will act as ambulance department."

Four of his comedians went toward the door.

"Wait," the leader commanded. "Before you enter that room, take off them hats."

The four nondescript hats came off silently. Then they discovered that the door was locked. However, that proved only a slight obstacle, for the lock was easily forced.

It struck me as funny that Mrs. Green had not walked out on the scene before this, or failing in that, that she had made no outcry when her retreat was invaded. A strange chill, premonition of coming disaster, gripped my heart.

The four men re-entered, carrying reverently a limp figure, which was unmistakably Mrs. Green. Had she been struck by a stray bullet from the attacking party? If she had, things certainly were looking black for Clair and myself. We had no way of proving that we were innocent and all circumstantial evidence would be against us. We had been found alone on the island with her.

The hostility of the posse increased markedly with the return of the four men. A murmur of anger ran around the room and the man with the rope fingered it nervously.

"Steady, boys." The sheriff checked them.

"One moment." The young man with the

camera held up his hand. "Stand just where you are; don't move."

There was a blinding flash and my overwrought nerves jumped seven feet and rebounded before my brain assured them that it was only a flashlight. (Memo: Organize Society for the Prevention of Flashlights.)

The effect on the four members of the ambulance squad was even more startling. Apparently not expecting the explosion they dropped their burden and stood with mouths open. Accidentally they dropped the body in a sitting posture.

There was a slight scream. Mrs. Green opened her eyes and demanded, "Where am I?"

If the officers of the law had been startled before, their condition now was absolute consternation.

"Madame," the sheriff enquired, "aren't you dead?"

"I should say not!"

"Then you are not Mrs. Green."

"I certainly am."

"But Mrs. Green is dead. Her daughter told us so."

"Dead! Fiddlesticks! It's a wonder I'm not, though, after coming over here in an open boat and being attacked by a half-naked savage with whiskers and, let's see—some one was shot—that's when I fainted, I guess, because I don't remember anything more until just now."

"All I have to say," stated the man with the rope, jamming his hat on disrespectfully, "is that this is a bum night to get a man out to play a joke on him."

"I hope you are not angry with me," Mrs. Green murmured, overawed by the disapproval of the men. "I can't see that I've done anything."

"Madame," the sheriff said, with gloomy politeness, "you have spoiled the only murder case we ever had in Maskeloon County, that's what you have done. Come on, boys."

In majestic silence the members of the sheriff's posse filed from the room. The young man with the camera was left behind, hastily picking up his traps in order to join the others before their boat left the island.

I approached him.

"Now that there is no murder mystery," I



"I hope you are not angry with me," Mrs. Green murmured, overawed.

"Madame," the sheriff said, with gloomy politeness, "Maskaloon County, that's what you ha



by the disapproval of the men. "I can't see that I've done anything."
You have spoiled the only murder case we ever had in
this town. Come on, boys." See Page 234

began, "I presume that the picture you took will be useless."

"Not at all," he answered, too busy folding up his tripod to notice that I had opened the shutter of his camera. "We'll find use for it some way."

I lit a match and held it about an inch from the lens of the camera, pretending to examine the name of the maker on it.

"What are you doing?" he demanded sharply.

"Just looking at your lens," I answered, blowing out the match. "It's a Dalmeyer, I see."

"Yes. I was afraid something might happen to that negative. I left the film in the camera."

"Did you?" I asked innocently and closed the shutter once more unobserved. "May we have one of the pictures if they turn out well?"

He paused on the threshold with a smile.

"If this picture turns out well," he said, "nearly everybody in the United States will have a copy of it. I'm a photographer for the Haniman Syndicate of Newspapers."

"That's what I thought," I answered, returning his smile.

After he was gone I added, "That's why I let that negative get light-struck."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
BACK TO GREEN'S ISLAND

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I TURNED wearily to my ill assorted companions. They were sitting silently on opposite sides of the table.

"Pardon me," I murmured, "I believe that you have not met. Mrs. Green, this is Mr. Lipton S. Clair."

They bowed stiffly to one another.

"Is he the one who wrote the article about fasting?" Mrs. Green asked me, again ignoring her vis-à-vis.

"He is," I admitted.

Mrs. Green said nothing further, but her thoughts, I know, were unbecoming to the president of the Charles Dickens Reading Club.

"I presume," Clair stated sourly, "Mrs. Green has forgotten that she stuck a hat-pin through my thumb less than half an hour ago."

"It was not a hat-pin. It was a safety pin, bent out straight. I was afraid it would not

reach. Was that your thumb you held over the keyhole?"

"It was. I suppose you are sorry it was not my eye."

I could see that the more we talked the worse the situation would get, so I interrupted them. "We might as well go back," I suggested wearily, surveying my companions. "I am going to the mainland, Mrs. Green, and I can leave you at home as I go by."

"You're not going away, Mr. Blainey?" Mrs. Green asked, with motherly kindness.

"Yes," I answered.

"What's the matter?" she queried gently. "Lucile? You mustn't let her fickleness hurt you. She has fads in beaux as well as fads in foods and exercises."

Advising a jealous lover not to care is a good deal like giving medicine to a dead man; it doesn't have any effect one way or the other. I appreciated Mrs. Green's thoughtfulness, but assured her with what dignity I had left that I would prefer to consider my visit at an end.

When we descended to the shore to embark on the *Merry Widow* Mrs. Green took one look

at the lake and flatly declined to travel by boat until it was calm.

"I don't know how I came over here. I couldn't have been in my right senses even to start, but I certainly am perfectly sane now, and as long as I remain so I intend to stay on dry land while a storm is in progress."

"But your daughter will worry," I protested. "Lucile has been very nearly distracted for twenty-four hours."

"She might better be distracted today than an orphan on her mother's side tomorrow. Anyway, I'll telephone her that I'm all right."

"But we can't leave you here," I renewed my argument, "and I have to go back."

"Perhaps the gentleman here—" Mrs. Green began.

"No," Clair declined, looking at his thumb. "I have to be in Fair View before morning to prevent my friend's marriage."

I took him one side.

"You can't go into Fair View wearing a Mother Hubbard," I reminded him.

"Well, I can stop and get my own clothes."

"On Green's Island? And meet Miss Dunmore again?"

"I'd forgotten about her. What can I do?"

"Stay right here and I'll send the boat back with a suit of clothes in an hour."

He wavered.

"Is the lady, Mrs. Green, a wife or widow?"

"She has a husband living."

"All right, then. My own clothes, that I came ashore in this morning, are on a line on the back porch, where I hung them to dry. Send them back soon. I don't know what I should do if Mrs. Green should fall in love with me."

I surveyed him from the hem of his skirt to the tip of his beard. "As long as you have those clothes on," I gravely assured him, "you're as safe as a dollar in Hetty Green's bank."

Clair suffered himself to be led back to Mrs. Green, to whom I announced the arrangement which we had made.

Before I left, Mrs. Green telephoned to Lucile and told her that she was safe. I took the liberty of ransacking the pantries and store-

room of the Huntingdon house for supplies and carried away enough tinned stuff to assure the garrison at Green's Island at least one square meal.

Bill and myself embarked alone. I carry with me yet in memory the picture of Mrs. Green and Lipton S. Clair as I left them, two strangely clad figures, one in a red ball-gown, the other in a calico wrapper and whiskers, hobnobbing over a pot of tea.

The journey back was uneventful. The sea had calmed down enough so that we shipped very little water and the motor was on its good behaviour. When we landed at Green's Island I was thankful to note that there were no lights in the house. Apparently everyone had gone to bed for a much needed rest. I looked at my watch. It was nearly three o'clock. I had plenty of time to finish up my business on Green's Island and get away with my prisoner before there was any danger of anyone waking up.

I sent Bill up to get Clair's clothing while I unloaded the supplies and hid them under the dock. I expected to telephone Jim in the morn-

ing and tell him where they were, so that he could cook breakfast for the castaways. Bill apparently experienced no difficulty in finding the clothes, and when he returned I helped him put out to sea again. This required considerable persuasion and three dollars in money. I also had to promise to make it all right with the newspaper man whom he had brought over in the first place.

I made that promise with more assurance than I had any right to feel, considering how much I had to make right with that young man on my own account before Bill should return to take us to the mainland. The chances were that the young reporter in the summer house regarded myself and Tootles with about equal favor at that moment, but I set out resolutely to convince him that I was one of his very best friends.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
A FIRE AND A RESCUE

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was then that the next adventure in this Arabian nightmare occurred.

I happened to glance at the house to wonder bitterly if Lucile was sleeping peacefully or if her conscience troubled her slumbers because of her unjust treatment of me. At first I thought it was the reflection of the rising sun in the windows of the cottage which caused the red light, but when I looked to the east I saw that the sun was not up.

Then the house must be on fire!

Clearly I had no time to lose. Probably everyone was sleeping. I ran up the path from the beach to the house, my temples bursting with the exertion. Could I get there in time to save the entire household?

The building was a frame one and offered little resistance to fire. By the time I got to the front door the flames were beginning to lick out of one of the upstairs windows.

I threw myself against the front door and broke the lock without ceremony. Luckily the downstairs portion was not touched by fire as yet. The stairway was still clear.

I dashed up, yelling "Fire!" as loudly as I could.

When I got to the top of the stairs I ran into Captain Perkins, who was partially dressed.

"What's the matter?" he asked mildly.

"Matter?" I repeated. "The house is on fire. Didn't you know it?"

"No. I couldn't sleep and I got up and smoked a pipe of tobacco. Then I wanted a drink and I been having the durndest time finding any water in the house."

I paid little attention to what he was saying, but pounded on all the doors, one after another.

The people began to come out in various stages of undress, carrying clothing and valuables. Vida's stage experience stood her in good stead. She emerged from her room completely dressed and went downstairs as if she were answering a rehearsal call.

All were accounted for but Lucile.

I pounded on her door again and again.

"Hurry!" I commanded at frequent intervals.

"I'm hurrying," she always answered.

At last the smoke began to be unbearable in the hallway and the crackling of the flames warned me that in an instant the stairs would be impassable.

I stood on ceremony no longer. I threw open Lucile's door and walked into that young lady's room. She was standing there in her night gown, looking aimlessly about her, with a stocking in one hand.

"I can't find my other stocking," she announced calmly.

"Don't be excited," I shouted. "The house is on fire and we've got to get out."

"I'm not excited. But I can't find but one stocking. How can I escape with only one stocking?"

There was no time for argument. I grabbed a dressing-gown or kimono that was flung over the foot of her bed, wrapped her in it, and swept her off her feet and into my arms.

The rescue was very simple. There was a

little smoke on the stairway and in a minute it would have been hard to get down, but as it was I only had to hold my breath for a few seconds and we were safe on the first floor, which had not caught yet.

However, I carried Lucile clear out in the front yard and deposited her in the little group of scantily clad survivors.

"Where's the fire department?" asked Vida, whose experience with the destroying demon was confined to Broadway conflagrations.

"There isn't any fire department," Kent volunteered gently.

"Can't anything be done?"

"Not much now." I shrugged my shoulders. "When a fire gets that much headway in a country house built of wood there is nothing much to do but save the nearby buildings. As there aren't any nearby buildings except the shed there is nothing to do but watch it burn."

"How could it have caught?" asked Bopp, trying to put his left shoe on his right foot. He had carried them both out in his hands.

"No one was up," said Jim, the fireman.

"How did you come to be around, Monty?" Bopp straightened up with a quick glance at me. "Mrs. Green telephoned that you were going to the mainland."

It hardly seemed possible, but I knew that for a moment they all suspected me of having set fire to Lucile's house in revenge for our quarrel of the evening before.

"I came back to the island for something and I noticed the fire," I explained weakly. "The flames were coming out of the window of the northeast room."

"Who slept there?" Captain Perkins asked practically.

No one answered.

"That's funny." Captain Perkins was sarcastic. "Didn't anybody sleep in the northeast room? Or don't you know where you slept?"

"You slept there yourself," Jim explained, rather hesitant about calling his superior officer's attention to such a damning fact.

"Oh." The captain collapsed. "I guess I did."

"Where did you empty the ashes of your

pipe before you went to get that drink of water?" I interrogated.

"Why, lemme see. I must have dumped 'em in the waste basket. But the fire was all out." The captain added this last, bristling with self-defense against the unspoken accusation of his fellows.

Any further discussion was cut short by the violent ringing of the telephone bell inside the burning building.

"Who can that be calling up at this time of night?" wondered Vida, voicing the general curiosity.

"We probably will never know." Bopp gazed dreamily into the fire. "Maybe someone saw the blaze from the mainland and is calling up about it."

"No," said Lucile with conviction, "it's my mother. She has seen the fire from Huntingdon's and wants to know if I am safe. We must answer it and tell her that everything is all right."

"No one could go in there," I protested. "The fire is raging in the living-room and the walls may fall any moment."

"But mother will worry."

"What if she does?" A man under stress of excitement is sometimes unintentionally brutal.

"If you men are not brave enough," Lucile declared with eyes flashing, "if you're so afraid of getting singed I'm going in to answer that telephone myself, and tell my mother that I am safe."

"You wouldn't be safe if you were talking over that telephone." I was exasperated, but it was impossible to allow a girl in a flimsy nightdress and negligée to go into that furnace. "Since you put it that way, I'll go."

Amid a storm of well meant protests from the others I left them and made a quick dash for the front door, dodging the falling sparks. Once inside, the atmosphere was a trifle clearer. Owing to the terrific draft up the stairway most of the smoke went that way instead of spreading through the main room. There was plenty, however, and the roaring of the flames made a very unpleasant accompaniment to the telephone bell, which kept on ringing with undiminished insistence.

I groped my way to the instrument, jammed the receiver to my ear and shouted, "Hello."

"Sorry to waken you, old chap," said a male voice apologetically, "but I simply must speak to Miss Dunmore."

"You go to hell," I requested loudly, and dropping the receiver made a wild dash for the door, from which I emerged with my clothing on fire in only one or two spots.

"Thank you." Lucile was very sweet in bestowing her gratitude. "Was she very much worried?"

"It wasn't your mother," I said shortly. "It was Mr. Blaney."

"Ned?" asked Vida, then without waiting for an answer, "I must speak to him."

I gently restrained her.

"Blaney?" queried Lucile blankly, then turning to me. "Your brother?"

"No relation," I returned.

"He's my fiancé," Vida explained. "Just the darlinest old Blaney that ever lived. He's waiting for me at Fair View. We were to have been married today—or yesterday, rather."

"Oh." Lucile retired to her inner consciousness to think.

I told Vida that Blaney knew she was safe, as he had called up several times during the day.

"Where was I?"

"You were always out somewhere with Mr. Clair," I explained.

"You didn't tell Ned that, did you?"

"Why, yes, I guess I did. Why?"

"He's so jealous," sighed Vida. "It makes him furious when I talk to other men. Of course after we're married I'll train him differently, but now I have to be careful."

Owing to the heat of the fire it was probably not uncomfortable for such of our party as had not escaped with a complete equipment. Lucile's plight was the worst, as she had neither shoes nor stockings.

Vida, all sympathy, offered to give her part of her wardrobe and the ladies retired to the shed to effect a compromise change, Lucile protesting that she would not think of depriving Vida of any of her clothing.

"I guess there isn't a thing saved," rumi-

nated Bopp with the resignation which one has on viewing another's loss.

"Shucks." Captain Perkins was also resigned. "They carried lots of insurance. I writ the insurance myself. I run the agency over to town. They got five thousand dollars more insurance than the place is worth."

"The company will never allow it on a total loss," I remarked, wise to the business-like methods of insurance companies and experienced in the eagle-eyed ways of the appraiser.

"No, I reckon not."

"Then why did you let them take out so much insurance?" I demanded.

"I didn't think they'd ever have a fire," he confessed frankly, "and the more insurance I wrote the more commission I got."

Our attention was distracted from the burning building by the arrival of Bill Johnson who walked unannounced into the circle of light. The noise of the *Merry Widow* arriving had apparently been lost in the crackling of the flames.

"Well," I enquired, "were Mrs. Green and Mr. Clair all right?"

"I shall not know it," Bill replied phlegmatically. "I can't by Yimminy find 'em."

"Can't find them? Nonsense. Did you go up to the house?"

"Yes, sare. And I look in all the rooms. No one shall be in each."

"They can't have left. Mrs. Green said she wouldn't."

"What's up now?" Bopp enquired.

"Mrs. Green has disappeared once more."

"Eloped with Lipton S. Clair?"

"Impossible. You haven't seen him since he left here."

"What else could have happened?"

"I can't imagine. It's a small island and there would be no sense in supposing that she was hiding anywhere outside of the house. Besides they both knew that the boat was coming back soon to get them."

"Mrs. Green is so elusive," Bopp criticized, "that I should think that when once you located her you would have kept your eye on her."

"If I had," I reminded him, "you would probably all be burnt to cinders now. There

must be some plausible reason for Mrs. Green's disappearance. Suppose we don't tell her daughter right away until we try to find out what has happened. It would only cause additional worry in a night which has already been more of a strain than the average human constitution is accustomed to bear."

That was agreed upon.

"At any rate," Bopp said, "we can all go over to the mainland in the *Merry Widow* and get breakfast."

"No," declared Bill, shaking his head. "*Merry Widow*, she shan't run—she broke her valve spring. Maybe it take all day to fix she up."

"Then for heaven's sake get at it," Bopp growled crossly. "We don't want to stay here any longer than we have to. It was bad enough before the house burned down, but now—" He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"I fix him up wit' some wire, maybe," Bill cheerfully promised, after the custom of those who have to do with gasoline engines. Some of the most promising men I have ever met

have been connected with the motor repair business.

"*Merry Widow*," said Bill, picking up a discarded hairpin, "she been dam' good boat but her walves been little bit old. I believe she run yust so good now, maybe better, as she did fifteen year ago."

He departed once more to be with his floating darling, his hands swinging from his long arms like idle sledge hammers, his back bent in the position of one who crouches perpetually before stalled marine motors.

Lucile and Vida rejoined us presently. The former was wearing the kimono in which she had been carried out, and as Vida still appeared to be fully dressed, it was not patent, to the masculine eye at least, that any exchange of apparel had been made.

About this time the sun rose resplendently.

"Isn't that a lovely sky!" Vida exclaimed with chastened enthusiasm, shivering slightly. "It reminds me of a stage scene."

"Sunrises only remind me of breakfast," Captain Perkins groaned lugubriously.

I started.

"I have some breakfast for you," I announced.

"Soup?" Bopp uttered the word sarcastically.

"Oh, Tootles," murmured Lucile.

"I forgot," I said. "Tootles is found."

"What?"

"I found your dog, Tootles, last night."

"Oh, my darling."

I thought at first she meant me and prepared to be aloof but not too aloof, when her next words showed me there was no necessity.

"Where is my little sweetheart now?"

"In the summer house," I replied briefly.

"Oh, my Tootles girl," she exclaimed, "locked up in that cold barn of a place all night."

"I was there," I reminded her. "I stood it all right."

Lucile started out as fast as she could for the summer house.

"Wait a minute," I protested, wishing to explain about the other occupant of Tootles' prison.

"Wait?" she flashed at me. "When Tootles wants me? Never!"

She had a good start but I went after her.

"How about that breakfast?" Kent yelled after me.

"Wait till I come back," I returned over my shoulder.

Lucile broke into a run when she saw that I was following her and reached the door of the summer house first.

When I arrived I heard a scream. The picture was a trifle startling. On the floor lay the reporter, his face twisted up into an agonized expression, while Tootles stood over him, feebly licking his face, her little red tongue hardly able to wag, but still determined to make this lazy person get up.

"Oh," Lucile screamed, jumping up and down in her excitement, "he's killing Tootles!"

I'm afraid I laughed. Anyway, she cast a look of reproach at me and made a dive for the tired little pup. I don't believe Tootles appreciated the affection which was lavished on her because she reluctantly abandoned her

job of licking and dived the other way. That happened to be in the direction of the door, which I had carelessly left open. Tootles went through and dashed, barking, up the beach. Lucile followed after.

They were too fast for me. The last I saw of them was a tiny bobbing speck—that was Tootles—and a larger graceful figure with hair blowing free and kimono flying back—which was Lucile. Once she stopped, when she was nearly out of sight, and took off the kimono and threw it aside in order to run freer.

I sighed and returned to the summer house.

“What’s all the excitement?” the reporter demanded. “Who’s the pippin?”

“We had a fire,” I returned wearily. “Mr. Green’s house burned down.”

“Everybody asleep, I suppose.” The reporter sketched in the story from imagination. “You, the faithful watchman, see the flames, dash into the burning building and rescue the owner’s beautiful daughter. It’s a peach of a story.”

I failed to reflect his enthusiasm.

"It's too bad you can't marry her," he added, eyeing me ruefully. "You've got a wife and seven kids, I suppose."

"I have not," I retorted.

"Then you *can* marry her."

"Thanks."

"I mean you're not so terribly old and you might look all right if you washed your face and had some decent clothes."

For the first time I realized that I must be a pretty sad looking object, sartorially speaking at least. My clothes were wet, torn, singed and thoroughly mussed from having been slept in and rained on. My collar had long since ceased to be anything better than a limp rag.

I looked at him sharply. "What size collar do you wear?"

For an instant I saw his glance flicker to my neckband.

"Fourteen and a half," he replied glibly.

I grunted. "I'll have a look, anyway."

I rolled him over and removed the collar and necktie as carefully as possible. It was a fifteen and a half.

"Because you lied, I shall confiscate the necktie also."

I looked him over appraisingly.

"No," he shouted, interpreting my glance, "you couldn't wear another thing of mine."

"I'm afraid we coincide only in the neck," I sighed regretfully.

"Look here," he began belligerently, "don't you think this farce has gone far enough? I demand to be released. If you let me go now, I'll promise not to have you put in jail, and if you'll get me a picture of Miss Green, I'll give you five dollars."

"No," I decided absently, having already made up my mind before he asked.

"What are you going to do with me? You can't keep me here indefinitely."

"I don't know. It has been puzzling me. You know more about crime than I do; what do you suggest?" I measured the height of his collar with my eye. "I can't say that I care much for your selection of collar style."

"If you aren't going to let me go," continued the young man, whose mind seemed to dwell constantly on himself, "when is breakfast?"

"There, you have ruined an otherwise perfect day. No one knows when, where or what breakfast is. It is as elusive as '*Qu' est que c'est l'art?*' "

His mind did not follow the flight of mine. "No breakfast?" he questioned.

"Nope. Nary breakfast."

He sighed. "There's a cigar in my—" He started to tell me which pocket, when he recollected my propensity for confiscating his property.

"It's all right," I reassured him; "I'm not smoking at present."

"In my left hand upper vest pocket," he finished.

I found a flat leather case in the pocket he had indicated. I opened the case and a handful of crumpled tobacco fell out.

"I'm afraid I sat on it," I said apologetically.

He turned his face to the wall without a word. I left him alone with the dust of his last cigar.

When I had gone a short distance, I heard him sneeze, but decided not to return. He

might acquire the habit of snuff-taking, but it surely was not my place to prevent his getting that tobacco into his system by the only channel available.

CHAPTER TWENTY

“THE ONLY WAY”

CHAPTER TWENTY

WASHING one's face in a large ruffled lake is not the simple process you would imagine. It consists largely of going through the motions peculiar to reducing exercises and getting your feet wet, as I discovered in making my toilet. However, it can be done. After I had aired my features to dry them, I put on the purloined collar. This was also a triumph of brute force over the cussedness of inanimate things.

The collar was one of those widely advertised styles with a slot or notch in front instead of a buttonhole. I have since learned that no one should attempt to put one of these things on without first taking a two weeks' correspondence course in the subject, with diagrams. Also it is more difficult to do the trick if it is a secondhand collar because the notch or slot is not so stiff and consequently does not hold so well. I did not know all this at the time

and I never would have got harnessed up in it at all if I hadn't happened to invent a couple of new cuss words, which seemed to make it stay put long enough for me to get the cravat tied as a sort of reinforcement. I ordinarily wear a collar not more than half an inch in height. Putting a three-inch white wall around my neck is an improvement on the invention of old Dr. Guillotine, the well-known throat specialist.

When I was satisfied that I had done the best I could I rejoined the disconsolate group at the site of the one-time house. There were only four of them, Captain Perkins, Jim, Vida and Kent. Lucile had not returned.

"Where's Lucile?" Vida enquired.

"Tootles got away," I explained, "and she chased her. She'll catch her presently and come back."

"But Tootles is here." Vida indicated the dog playing around the shed. "She came back quite a while ago with this in her mouth."

Vida held up the torn and dirty remnants of what had been Lucile's kimono.

"That's Lucile's kimono." I identified it.

"But where is Lucile?"

An idea struck me. "What was she wearing under that?"

"I helped her put on my costume," Vida vouchsafed; "the one that was drying in the shed. It fits her beautifully."

"Then I presume that you will find Lucile over there behind that clump of bushes," I hazarded in a loud tone of voice.

There was a sound of branches breaking and leaves rustling as if someone were beating a hasty retreat.

"Oh, I see." Light dawned on Vida. "Just let her alone. She'll get used to them in an hour or so. You do feel kind of funny at first. Now about that breakfast."

"Yes," Bopp chimed in, "produce that feast you were speaking of. With the dog in sight we'll take a chance on anything you've prepared."

"Sail ho!" cried Jim.

"Where be she?" demanded his superior, who scorned nautical language.

"Just coming around the point," Jim replied, pointing.

Sure enough, a fat little tug boat was nosing her way comfortably through the waves into the cove.

"It's the revenue tug!" exclaimed Captain Perkins, whose knowledge of lake craft was naturally superior to that of the rest of us.

"A revenue tug?" Bopp repeated. "What is she doing here?"

"Let's go and find out." Vida led the way down to the dock.

The tug came in as far as she dared, and then an officer came ashore in a dinghy. He approached our party, cap in hand.

"Pardon me, ladies and gentlemen," he began suavely, taking no notice of our dishevelled appearance, "I am the revenue officer in charge of this district."

A wild cry of "Help" from the tug startled us.

"What's that?" we exclaimed in various keys.

The cry was repeated, this time with a smothered finish.

"It's just a couple of prisoners we captured this morning," explained the officer.

"We are very glad to see you and your boat," Bopp stated, doing the honors. "We have had a terrible fire here and if you will set us safely ashore at Fair View we shall be forever in your debt."

"I'm sorry," he replied, "but I cannot carry your party as passengers. Being on government service my duties are very exacting. However, I shall be glad to notify the first vessel I meet and request them to call for you."

"But, man," Bopp exclaimed, "we have been without anything to eat for three days. Surely you can't refuse to take us to some place where food may be had."

"You forget that I have provided food," I interposed.

"I'm trying to forget it," Bopp replied with ungracious impatience. "I want regular food. After the way they have been treated already, I'm not going to insult my insides with anything containing water and one fish scale for flavoring."

"The lake is calming down," the officer pointed out, "and you can surely get aid soon. As it happens we are hot on the trail of a gang

of smugglers and if we delay now the chief operator may escape us. He is posing as a telephone repair man employed by the local company in Fair View, but merely uses that position to cloak his criminal operations. He was sent to Green's Island before the storm and has not reported back to the office, so we presume that he is here now."

By a common impulse we looked for Kent. He was not among us. Apparently he had waited to hear no more after Captain Perkins had identified the boat as in the government revenue service.

"I can't believe that he is a smuggler," Vida argued. She, like the rest of us, had conceived a liking for the young man whose career had been so varied and interesting. "He doesn't look like a smuggler."

"I'm afraid that is no way to tell," the revenue officer said pleasantly. "The worst smugglers we have are society people, you know. Appearances cut no figure whatever. We captured two of his accomplices on Huntingdon's Island this morning, and when we get him we shall have wiped out one of the worst

gangs of smugglers operating across the border."

At the mention of Huntingdon's Island we all pricked up our ears. What connection did the smugglers have with the disappearance of Mrs. Green and Lipton S. Clair?

"While you were on Huntingdon's Island," I asked, "did you see anything of Mrs. Green?"

"Why," began the officer, with a puzzled frown, "one of our prisoners claims to be a Mrs. Green, but that is only an alias for 'Mother Farrel,' whose portrait is in the rogues' gallery. I recognized her at once."

"Who is your other prisoner?" I had an inkling of what had really happened at Huntingdon's Island since I had left it.

"The other one is a man masquerading in woman's clothes. He refuses to give his name, but I think he is Dan Maloney, a rather high class crook who does smuggling only as a side line for grand larceny."

"I'm afraid you have the wrong parties." I smiled as I thought of Lipton S. Clair's outraged dignity. "The lady really is Mrs. Green, and the gentleman is not Dan Maloney

but Mr. L. S. Clair, a well-known literary man."

The revenue officer's face fell, then a suspicious look came into his eyes. "How do I know that you are not one of the gang yourself and this is merely a trick to get us to release your pals? What was Mrs. Green doing over there anyway?"

"She was out in a small boat and was blown over there during the storm," Vida volunteered, seeing that I had run out of explanations.

She turned her four hundred candle-power glance in the direction of the officer. He received the blow right between the eyes. "Miss Green," he addressed her huskily, "I cannot refuse to take your word. I'll have the prisoners brought ashore and if the lady is really your mother I shall be glad to release her instantly."

Vida did not correct his mistake, but asked, "How do you know I am Miss Green?"

"Oh, I'd know you anywhere," he bragged, smiling. "I've seen your photograph in the newspapers so often."

So he had, but not with the name of Lucile Green attached to it.

"Thank you ever so much for your kindness."

"Not at all," he returned. Then addressing the man in the dinghy, "Smith."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Report to Marshal Cochran on board and ask him to bring his prisoners ashore."

The man departed and after an interval returned with three passengers, two of them unmistakably Mrs. Green and Mr. Clair, the other a United States federal officer. Mrs. Green was decorated with a handkerchief, which was tied over her mouth.

"I had to gag the dame," explained the marshal; "she kept yelling all the time."

The look which the dishevelled lady in the red ball-gown cast upon Uncle Sam's representative probably burned a hole in his aura which will never heal up.

"Remove the gag," the revenue officer commanded.

"Wait," Vida requested; "wait until after I have identified her."

That was a wonderful inspiration on Vida's part. As the two women had never set eyes on each other before, Mrs. Green might not address Vida as her own offspring as soon as the power of speech was restored to her.

"If you say she is your mother it is all right," said Vida's new conquest, gallantly. "You may remove the handkerchief yourself if you like. I trust your mother will forgive us for our blunder. Can you identify the gentleman, too?"

"She doesn't know me," Clair muttered, with a look of terror. "I don't want to be identified."

"I ought to know him," Vida replied wickedly. "I am seriously considering an offer of marriage from him."

"Let him go then," the revenue man directed.

"I don't want to be released."

"You have to be." The officer silenced him sternly.

"How about the telephone man?" Cochran, the marshal, enquired. "I've got to get one

prisoner, anyway, or I won't dare show up in Detroit."

"We'll arrest him all right," the other reassured him. "He's on the island somewhere. It's only a question of searching. Now, gentlemen," turning to us, "it will save any unpleasantness if you will point out which one of you is in the employ of the telephone company. If not I shall be forced to ask all of you who can not prove who you are to accompany me."

There was no answer. No one of us was anxious to turn informer.

"I have a description of Horace Binns," said the officer, "although at present he is travelling under the name of Kent. Height five feet four inches, slender, dark hair and eyes—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Bopp, "what are you going to do with the smuggler when you get him?"

"We shall have to take him to Detroit and thence to the Federal prison at Leavenworth, Kansas."

"Will you give him a square meal?" Bopp asked anxiously.

"Why, yes," smiled the officer. "We have a good cook on board, and we would not starve a prisoner."

"All right," Bopp sighed. "Do I fit the description?"

The officer laughed. "I knew you all the time, Binns. Step lively, get aboard and we'll have you safe in jail in no time."

With a wink to the rest of us, Bopp climbed into the boat with a demeanor that otherwise would have been a credit to Sydney Carton.

When the boat was being rowed away, he waved farewell.

"Don't worry," he reassured us, "I won't be in jail long."

"We won't worry," I answered for all. "Stay as long as you like."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
WHERE IS LIPTON S. CLAIR?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AFTER the tug had gone, Clair stood looking disconsolately after it.

"You don't seem overjoyed at being set free," I said to him in a low voice, so that the others could not hear.

"Didn't I tell you I wanted to be arrested so that Miss Dunmore would break our engagement? Jail is better than marriage any time. They shorten jail sentences for good behavior." He shook his fist at the departing tug. "They were just ready to have breakfast on board, too."

A confusion of inarticulate sounds advised me that Miss Dunmore was removing the gag from her hastily adopted mother's mouth.

"Who are you?" Mrs. Green demanded, as soon as she could speak. "Where's Lucile? What is the next thing I have to do, loop the loop or be electrocuted?"

"I'm a castaway, wrecked on your island," Vida explained. "Your daughter is all right."

"Where is she?" Mrs. Green fired the question at me as if I were in some way responsible.

"Why—" I started to explain, but realized suddenly that Mrs. Green might not take kindly to the idea of her daughter's present costume, so I stopped.

"She's over there." Captain Perkins waved in the general direction of the thicket where we had last heard Lucile.

"Dead?" Mrs. Green murmured, leaning for support on my arm.

"No, no," interposed Vida, who should have done the explaining in the first place. "She is just taking a nap. She has had such a terribly exhausting experience the last forty-eight hours that we were all thankful when she dozed off a little while ago. Poor thing, the rest will do her a world of good."

"What's she sleeping over there for?" pointing at the bushes. "Why isn't she in her own bed in the house?"

"Oh, the house," Vida repeated blankly.

"Didn't anyone tell you? There isn't any house."

"No house? Why not?"

"Your house, madam," said Captain Perkins, "has been consumed by the devouring element." He quoted a fire insurance advertisement from memory.

"Well, well," Mrs. Green repeated in a daze. "Well, well."

Lipton S. Clair plucked me by the sleeve to attract my attention, and whispered in my ear, "Where are my pants?"

"Why," I replied, "I sent them over to Huntingdon's Island, as I promised I would."

"Are they there now?"

"Yes. Bill left them in the kitchen for you."

"Then I suppose I'll have to wear this."

"I should think that it would be immodest if you didn't."

He walked away. With his skirts held out before him with both hands as if he expected something to drop into his lap from heaven, stepping high because he couldn't see the ground in front of his feet, he was a dead

ringer for my childhood's conception of Elisha going out to see if the bears would bite him. On taking a second look, I decided that he might with equal facility be mistaken for one of the bears.

"Take me to my daughter," Mrs. Green said with a sigh. "Let me see that there is something left of my life as it was before the earthquake."

"You can see her if you wish," said Vida calmly, "but I assure you she is all right, and you will only disturb her from a sleep which she needs very, very much."

Vida is an admirable liar. Mrs. Green actually believed her, and ceased to worry about Lucile. Mrs. Green is one of those placid ladies who let other people bully them and mould their very thoughts. Lucile had always made her mother think just whatever she told her to, and Vida was apparently able to do the trick also.

We walked up to inspect the ruins. It was as nice and complete a set of ruins as I have ever gazed upon. Nothing was left to the imagination—the whole business was ruined.

While we were engaged in that mournful amusement, a tall, muscular young man walked into our circle and demanded, "Where is Lipton S. Clair?"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
A WEDDING INVITATION

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"NED!" Vida exclaimed, rushing toward him. She stopped when she saw his face.

He brushed past her.

"Ned Blaney!" shouted Clair, joyfully advancing toward the young man.

"You treacherous hound!" hissed Blaney, gazing on that whiskered travesty without smiling. "You stole the only woman I ever loved away from me. Heart breaker!"

"I couldn't help it," Clair admitted.

"Viper!" yelled Blaney, as he fell on his friend.

It would have been a fairer fight if Clair had not been hampered by his skirts. As it was, it ended with Blaney athwart Clair's back, grinding his nose into the dirt.

"I give up," choked Clair. "I'll marry her."

"Marry her?" Blaney shook his friend again. "Not while I live."

"Isn't that what you're trying to make me do?" Clair expostulated, as well as he could. "I don't want to, that's certain."

"Don't you see, Ned," Vida interrupted soothingly, "he doesn't want to marry me. Your outrageous jealousy has led you into making mistakes again."

"But," doubted Blaney, still retaining his position of advantage on Clair's back, "every time I called up here they said you were out together, and when I asked for you on the telephone early this morning, he told me to go to—"

"I was the one you were talking to," I hastened to interrupt. "The house was burning down, and I didn't have time to tell you that a cinder had just lit on my ear while I was talking to you."

"Has there been a fire?" asked the young man, scrambling to his feet. "Were you saved, my darling Vida?"

"I was," Vida said gravely.

The excited young man abandoned his prostrate friend and rival and embraced Vida.

"Who," he demanded, releasing her and

holding her off at arm's length, "who saved you?"

"Mr. Blainey, here." Vida smiled mischievously in my face as she directed the strenuous young bear's attention my way.

"How?" Blaney made his demand, jealously picturing Vida a limp figure in my arms.

"By rapping on my door and shouting 'Fire!' you goose," laughed Vida.

"Oh, all right, then." Blaney admitted her to the favour of his arm again.

"Ned apologizes for being a bear," Vida said over her shoulder to Mrs. Green, who was quite overwhelmed by the whirlwind young gentleman.

"I'm sorry," corroborated Blaney. "I've been under a terrible nervous strain. First I was afraid Vida was lost in the storm and then when I tried to reach her she was always away from the telephone. Then, this morning after I called up and couldn't speak to her, I kept calling again and again, but Central said the wire was dead. I was nearly frantic till I got hold of a rowboat and came over. It was an awful pull in the sea that's running out there.

But it's all right now. You must all come over to Fair View to see Vida and me get married this morning."

Clair was listening to all this in a sort of a dazed wonder.

"Don't I have to marry her?" he asked.

"Have to marry her?" echoed Blaney, good-naturedly. "Why, you old rhinoceros, you couldn't trap a girl into marrying you even if you dressed up like Mrs. Katzenjammer to please her."

"But she said—" began Clair.

Vida flashed an imploring look at me. Clair could still do a good deal of damage if he revealed all that she had said and done trying to win that wager from me.

"She said," I repeated, brushing off and adjusting Clair's skirt, which had suffered sadly from his rough and tumble encounter, "she said that she knew she would like you because you were a friend of Mr. Blaney's."

"Stop pinching my leg," roared Clair, failing to get the significance of my signal, and whisking his skirts out of my grasp. He glared at me balefully.

Blaney laughed. The picture Clair made obliterated the recollection of his jealousy for a moment. Then he caught sight of my seal ring on Vida's hand.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"That?" echoed Vida blankly, turning the ring on her finger. She had forgotten that she was wearing it. "That is a seal ring."

"Yes, I see it is," admitted her fiancé sarcastically. "Your explanation so far is perfectly satisfactory."

"I got it for you," she pouted, "but I don't know whether to give it to you or not."

When Vida had definitely cast herself for the part she was going to play, she went ahead with the certainty of a trained artist.

"Let's see it," Blaney demanded doubtfully.

She handed it to him.

"Hm!" He examined it closely. "You got this for me? The 'B' is all right but this other initial looks like an 'M.'"

"No, it doesn't, dear," she said. "That's an old English 'N.' The old Englishmen did things differently. Their 'N's' always look

like 'M's.' I've known lots of old Englishmen."

"Oh," the young man said, slipping the ring on his finger. "Thanks awfully, dear."

That was the end of my ring.

Bill Johnson ambled up to our party with a triumphant grin on his face.

"She shall run," he announced. "For two dollars she shall take everybody to Fair View."

"That's a lot to pay if you've ever spent a day in Fair View," said the prospective bridegroom; "nevertheless, I will pay it and ask you all to come to our wedding and the wedding breakfast."

"Could it be possible," Captain Perkins asked, "to have the wedding breakfast first?"

"I think it could," laughed Blaney.

"Come on, everybody," invited Vida.

I started to follow the others, but Vida dropped back to my side and whispered, "You're not invited."

"What?" I exclaimed, startled.

"You're not supposed to come."

"Why not?"

"If I were you, I should get lost in the woods

somewhere. You might run into something to your advantage."

"I couldn't. What would she think of me?"

"Try it and find out." Vida smiled at me quizzically. "I'm a woman myself, and I can guess. You won't need to make any advances. Don't you want her?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Then don't bother about anyone else's wedding breakfast. Just attend to your own."

"She's engaged to Bopp," I protested feebly.

"To make you angry," she whispered. "I can't talk to you any more because Ned is getting red behind his ears. That means that he is fearfully jealous. I must run along and be scolded. Think it over."

She skipped blithely to the side of her soon-to-be lord and master (maybe), smiling into his face with a look so childlike and ingratiating that Othello would have eaten the bolster himself had he been in Blaney's shoes.

Mrs. Green halted the procession.

"I can't go without Lucile."

"Mr. Blainey will explain it to Lucile," Vida assured her, taking my acquiescence for

granted. "You see, I need you terribly because I have no other woman friend with me. My own mother—" her lips quivered.

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Green. "Has she been dead long?"

"She isn't dead, but she's in a stock company in St. Louis."

"You really ought to go to the mainland," I said, thinking to help matters out, "in order to bring back some clothes for Lucile."

"What's that?" Mrs. Green turned. "Hasn't she any clothes on?"

"Certainly," Vida hopped into the breach sure-footedly, "she has plenty of clothes on, but they would not be suitable for her to wear to go over to the mainland and register at a hotel."

Vida spoke the truth almost as convincingly as she lied.

"Please come," she urged.

"I'll go," decided the older woman.

Fortunately she forgot that her own costume was a trifle bizarre for a morning wedding, even in Fair View.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
"THE HONOR OF THIEVES"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I CONDUCTED the company to the dock and saw that they were made as comfortable as possible in the *Merry Widow*. When I would have cast off the lines by which she was fastened to the dock, Bill Johnson remonstrated.

"She shan't go—not until the young mans comes what say he shall pay three dollar to come over."

"What young man?" Mrs. Green demanded.

"Why, just a young man." I looked helplessly at Vida for assistance. I couldn't tell the truth and I thought maybe an idea would occur to her.

One did.

"It's Clarence Jones," said Vida.

"A friend of yours?" Blaney eyed her distrustfully.

"No, not at all," Vida said glibly; "he's an old college friend of the other Mr. Blainey."

"What's he doing here?"

"Why, he just dropped in."

"Oh—he was passing by in this old tub and—"

"She not be tub by damsite." Only one thing would rouse Bill's anger, an insult to his craft. "Yee Viss, there ain't not a better boat—"

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," apologized Blaney. "All that I want to say is that if this guy Jones is going back in the boat, I'm not. Jones sounds to me like a fishy name."

"It is," Vida teased. "I've met a great many fish named Jones."

"Well," Mrs. Green declared, "I certainly am not going to leave the island while there is a strange young man roaming around."

She started to get out of the boat.

"Wait!" I halted her. "I'll go and get him."

"He don't go in this boat," stated Blaney.

"If he doesn't, I won't go," asserted Mrs. Green, with equal firmness.

"Bill," I commanded, "get that row boat that Mr. Blaney rowed over in and tie it on behind the *Merry Widow*."

I departed for the summer house, vaguely

wondering if I could silence the reporter without using chloroform.

When I entered the summer house he eyed me with a cold gleaming sort of hate, that made me think of Italian daggers or Malay krisses.

"If I let you go," I began the parley, "how much will you take to shut up and not ask any questions?"

"Nothing doing," he declared without hesitation. "I'm going to get you, and I'm going to get you good."

"That's all right," I conciliated. "You can get me just as soon as you like, but all I ask is that you do nothing to injure some perfectly harmless people."

He looked at me keenly.

"You're not the care-taker here, as I thought, are you?"

"Why, no," I replied modestly, "not in a professional way, anyhow."

"Who are you?" His newspaper instinct made him put the usual questions in spite of his dislike.

"I'm just a guest," I said.

"I know, but where shall I find you if you dare meet me when we get off this island and my hands aren't tied? What's your name?"

"You can find me any time you like in the editorial rooms in the New York *Planet* and my name is Blainey."

"Not Montmorency Blainey, the dramatic critic?"

"That's the one." I was gratified that my fame had spread so far.

"They say," quoted the reporter, "that you are the worst dramatic critic in New York."

"That is an enviable distinction," I murmured, "in a place where they are so numerous and so bad."

"What I mean is, that you are the most severe. If a play gets praise from you, it's sure of success."

"Well, hardly that," I explained. "I have picked a good many winners, that's all."

The young man offered himself some mental problem for a few moments. Then he looked up at me.

"I've written a play," he announced.

"Only one?" I asked, with simulated inter-

est. "Almost every person in the United States has written one play. To attain distinction you must measure your dramatic achievements by the bushel."

"But mine is different."

"Yes? Wherein lies the difference?"

"Mine is going to be produced."

"That may or may not be an advantage."

"With your help it is going to be an advantage."

"How is that?" I enquired politely, with a sinking premonition of what my part was going to be.

"When the play is produced you are going to hail it as the great American play of the century. No matter if the other critics condemn it, they will qualify their criticism when they note your enthusiasm. They will go again and discover subtle merits that escaped their first attention. Started by your panegyric, its fame will grow, the public will attend, I shall get contracts for more plays and I shall have arrived."

"Very clever," I sneered, "but your play is probably rotten, and I shall tell the public so."

"Then I'll tell all I know about what has happened on Green's Island, and I shall hint at a lot of things I don't know. If you will agree to like my play, I'll promise to shut up and not ask any more questions."

He looked me squarely in the eye.

"Does Mrs. Green ordinarily drink too much?" he asked.

His guess was too near the mark for comfort. I took out my knife and cut his bonds.

"Thanks, old man," said the reporter, slowly stretching his aching muscles before attempting to get up.

"They are waiting to take you back to Fair View," I informed him.

"They?" he enquired. "Who are they?"

"All the principal characters in that story you were going to write. By the way, your name is Jones—Clarence Jones—you're an old school friend of mine."

"Any particulars?" he asked, as we walked down to the dock.

"It isn't necessary. They won't have a chance to pump you because you are going to be towed behind the rest in a row boat."

"Why is that?"

"You promised not to ask any more questions," I reminded him.

He subsided, racking his brain for a reason for such a fool piece of business.

At the dock I introduced him perfunctorily to his fellow voyagers and he took his seat docilely in the row boat.

Bill Johnson cranked up his engine and the *Merry Widow* started blithely away. When she was a few feet from the dock, the engine stopped.

"What's the matter? Broke down?" I shouted.

"No," answered Bill, "I yust stop her because you forgot to tal me what for Mrs. Green be on Huntingdon's Island. You say you tal me and you forget."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Green, "and I want to know how I came to be floating out on the lake during the storm with my red dress on."

I reflected a moment.

"The young man in the row boat knows all about it," I shouted. "You can ask him as

soon as you get to the mainland." I didn't add that he wouldn't answer.

"Mr. Blainey," yelled the reporter as the engine started up again.

"Yes," I replied.

"The name of that play is, 'The Honor of Thieves.' "

"All right." I waved my hand in farewell.

The *Merry Widow* towed my troubles around a point of land at the entrance of the cove and out of sight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR
THE FOREST OF ARDEN

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE FOREST IN ARDEN

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I SMILED to myself as I turned away, and I whistled an aria that was partly Puccini's and partly my own in places where I couldn't remember the original.

The provisions I had brought from Huntingdon's Island were still where I had hidden them. I took them with me. If I was going to get thoroughly lost, at least I should be well provisioned.

On my way to the trackless depths of this half-mile wide wilderness I stopped at the summer house and unearthed some tea things which I knew were stored there in a locker. There was a lunch cloth, silver, china, a small caddy of tea and tiny water heater, all of which I added to my pack.

With a last look at the lake which was now a jewelled mirror for the sun I plunged through the underbrush into the warm, soft by-paths of the forest. The leaves rustled pleas-

antly under foot as I walked along and the squirrels and birds overhead scolded me and told one another that there was a gypsy chief-tain abroad in the forest. For surely the birds and the squirrels recognized my character even if some of the outward signs and trappings were missing. A slight breeze, only a tattered shred of the boisterous storm that had passed, stirred the leaves just enough to shake through an occasional dancing sunbeam.

After I had lost myself in the forest as far as I could without coming out again on the other side, I put down my burden and prepared to abandon myself to despair as comfortably as possible. I was rather relieved to find that I had given up hope of finding my way, very close to the spring which I believe I have mentioned as existing on the island. At any rate I should not die of thirst.

A fairly flat tree-stump looked extraordinarily like a table when a cloth was spread on it and places set for two. There was a cheerful look, too, about the tea-kettle when the alcohol lamp under it had been lit long enough to make it send out tiny curly spirals of steam. And

over all a flicker of sunlight romped about the table as if the fairy, "Tinker Bell," were touching the dishes to make it a magic feast.

Opening the canned goods was no difficult matter to one who had successfully done battle with a half a bushel of reluctant clams. There were sardines, potted ham, peanut butter, jam and a tin of crackers. Of course such things are not to be compared to a steak with mushrooms or turkey with cranberry sauce or even ham and eggs, but they have certain attractions for the person who has not eaten for several days which I need hardly dwell upon.

I did not eat, though. Instead I leisurely brewed a pot of tea. I had never cared a great deal about tea before, but the aroma of that particular brew will haunt me when other perfumes have lost their savor.

I drew up two pieces of fallen tree trunk to serve as chairs and seated myself on one side of the table. My trap was ready.

Presently there was a sound of breaking twigs in the underbrush nearby. I pretended not to notice. Then Tootles came forth, frisking and wagging her tail. I petted her.

Someone coughed in back of me. I turned. Parting the bushes on either side like the folds of a heavy green velvet drop curtain, stood the shy spirit of the wood.

"I had to make you turn around," she said apologetically, "and get it over with."

Never was a fairer Rosalind. She held up her head with a fine courage in spite of the crimson blushes which chased each other over her face and neck, and she stood straight in the high-heeled soft kid boots, a slender figure, almost boyish, save for a slightly curving bosom and a soft roundness of the knee.

"Won't you sit down?" I had risen when she first appeared and I indicated the rough log seat opposite mine.

"Were you expecting someone?" she asked, casting an anxious look at the seat. She was wishing she was in it with her boots under the table cloth.

"Why, yes," I pretended to be hesitant about confiding in her. "I was expecting someone, a lady, one that I am very fond of, but I am afraid that she has disappointed me. Won't you take her place?"

"Thank you," she said simply and slid into the seat.

When I poured her some of the tea and offered her such food as was available she accepted everything and ate with unembarrassed appetite. It may sound unromantic to say that we satisfied our hunger without conversation, but remember that there had been many hours when talk had been our only substitute for food. Tootles had some of everything, including tea, which proves to my mind conclusively that she isn't a regular dog. But no more of that.

"I'm sorry," my vis-à-vis said at last, leaning forward with her chin resting on the backs of her clasped hands, "I'm sorry to be sitting in the place of someone else whom you would prefer to have here." Then she added, with a little sigh, "That is, if you would prefer someone else."

"I would and I wouldn't," I smiled. "I am trying to imagine that you are she."

"In these—in this costume?"

"It is difficult to imagine her dressed as you are, but not impossible. I admit though, that

it would be easier to picture you in her dress than her in yours."

"What do you suppose was the reason that she did not come?"

"She is angry with me."

"How could she be?"

"I have displeased her."

"If she has been angry it must be that she forgot for the moment how brave you are and how kind."

"She said she never wanted to see me again."

"And you said you would never enter her house again. Yet you broke your word when she was in danger and she was very glad to see you indeed." She reached across the table impulsively and laid her small brown fingers in my palm.

"What would you do," I asked, "if you were she?"

"I'd come and find you," she answered, "and when I'd found you, I'd put my hands in yours, just like this, and I'd ask your forgiveness for being a cross, cranky, old maid."

"But she isn't an old maid." I held her fingers tightly lest she draw them away.

"She'll be twenty-five tomorrow." She laughed. "And if a girl isn't married by the time she is twenty-five she is an old maid."

"Then she'll never be an old maid," I declared, "because by this time tomorrow she'll be married. That is," I added, "if she'll accept a stout, middle-aged man for a husband."

"There isn't one on this island," she declared, looking at me with shining eyes. "You can't claim to be stout when your belt nearly reaches around you twice. Monty," she gave my hand a quick little squeeze, "you're a dear."

"Will you marry me?" I asked.

"Of course. I decided that long ago. Do you suppose I'd let any man see me in this costume unless he was going to marry me?"

I pulled her toward me.

"Excuse me, folks," said a voice, "I hate like the deuce to butt in on the Sothern and Marlowe stuff and I certainly have enjoyed it, but I've got to make a get-away and I can't do a Brodie out of this tree without disturbing you."

We looked up at the anxious face of Kent peering between the branches.

"That revenue boat is coming back, and it's a

cinch they're going to get me this time if I stick around this dinky island. I've got to beat it."

He scrambled down.

"How can you get away?" I asked.

"The launch," he explained briefly. "I've been fixing her up on the q. t. this week getting ready for an emergency. She looks good for fifteen miles an hour."

"Sixteen," corrected Lucile.

"All the better then. I'll lose 'em out there. I don't suppose you two doves will mind if I keep 'em so busy that they ain't got time to land Mr. Bopp for an hour or so." He grinned.

"Not a bit," I answered. "Good luck."

He started for the cove. I watched him out of sight.

When I turned back, the bench opposite me was empty. A slender figure was stealthily making for the shelter of the thicket.

When I had caught her and punished her as she deserved for desertion I still held her tight in my arms for fear she would escape me again.

"By the way," I asked casually some time

later, "where would you like to spend your honeymoon?"

She considered a moment and then parted her lips in a slow smile.

"I think I'd like to spend our honeymoon in a dining-car."

THE END

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